

Riding the Wave of Emotions

You might feel it in a long, deep hip opener like Pigeon pose or in an energizing backbend like Upward-Facing Bow or in a soothing Child's pose; unexpected emotions start to percolate to the surface as you open up blocked energy in your body. Sometimes the feelings flow through you like a gently rolling stream. Other times, the emotions hit you hard like wild, raging ocean waves.

BY ANGELA AMBROSE

Our body and mind are intimately connected, so when you stretch and open up your physical body, you may start to feel a deep release on an emotional level – ranging from sadness and anxiety to fear and frustration.

“Emotion is energy in motion,” says Mary Bruce, a Level II certified ParaYoga® teacher who leads teacher trainings, retreats and workshops in the U.S. and worldwide. “If you allow the emotion to bubble up to the surface, and then give it time and space to reveal to you the information contained within it, then it can continue to move freely. But if we tamp it down or repress it, it’s going to go and get stuck somewhere else.”

Tightness and tension are often felt in the hips, neck, back and shoulders. Because yin and restorative poses are held in stillness for an extended period, they may be more likely to stir up emotions than fast-moving flowing poses, especially if you hold them to your edge. Many students find the greatest emotional release at the end of class when they surrender to stillness and lie on their back in a sweet, vulnerable Savasana pose, allowing tears to flow and stress to melt away.

Through the breath and poses, yoga can help transform your emotions, so you feel more balanced, open and peaceful. The key is to give yourself time to feel the

emotions without judgment and let them move through you instead of fighting or running away from them.

“Your emotions can only be changed by your awareness of them,” says Bija Bennett, author of *Emotional Yoga: How the Body Can Heal the Mind*. “Instead of being swept along by your emotions and moods, you can learn how to shape them.”

Harness Your Breath

Your breath acts as a mirror for your emotions. If you’re overstressed or angry, your breath may become short or irregular, and when you are feeling relaxed and content, your breath is naturally smoother and calmer.

When you explore your emotions, start with a long, steady Ujjayi Breath (see *Ocean-Sounding Breath* sidebar) and keep your focus on the sound of your breath as you dive deeper into the sensations.

To help build your internal energy, breathe only



through the nose and avoid excessive sighing out the mouth, which tends to dissipate energy.

“Conscious breathing is the most powerful tool for emotional healing,” says Bennett. “The moment you turn your attention to your breath, you’re immediately in touch with your body, and from there, you can start to be aware of your emotions. You have to *allow* yourself to feel, bringing your emotional experience into conscious awareness.” As a yoga therapist, Bennett treated thousands of patients at Deepak Chopra’s Ayurvedic clinic and co-taught workshops with him worldwide.

Take Time Out to Feel and Heal

Distressing emotions can spill out not only while you’re on your mat, but also when you’re simply going about your daily life – when your child is having a tantrum in the middle of a shopping mall, when you’re stuck in rush hour traffic after a long, grueling day at work or when you are at a loved one’s bedside. If it’s not the right moment to deal with the emotions, take time later to come back to those feelings by sitting quietly and using simple body and breath awareness (See *6 Steps to Taming Your Emotions* sidebar). You can also reconnect with your emotions through other meditative activities such as journaling, chanting, or taking a walk or hike and spending time in nature.

In today’s fast-paced, go-go lifestyle, Bennett says many people choose to stuff their emotions inside them and use escape mechanisms: “It’s easier to turn on the TV or get on the phone than it is to be patient and attend to what is bubbling up inside. We tell ourselves that we’re too busy to deal with it now, but when we resist our emotions in any way, we miss out on

6 STEPS TO TAMING YOUR EMOTIONS

TUNE IN TO THE SENSATIONS IN YOUR BODY Scan your body from head to toe. Without judgment, notice where you feel tight, achy or open.

BREATHE EVENLY Using the Ocean-Sounding Breath (see side bar), focus your full attention on this steady, long breath.

BECOME AWARE OF YOUR FEELINGS Ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” Shine the light of your awareness on your emotions and observe with curiosity. Do not create a story around the emotion. Simply notice what you feel in this moment.

ALLOW YOUR EMOTIONS TO FLOW FREELY If an emotion starts to bubble up, stay with it. Allow yourself to sit with the feeling in stillness. You may feel strong, uncomfortable emotions such as sadness, fear, anger or anxiety, or perhaps the sweetness of gratitude and joy, or the heaviness and dullness of fatigue. Whatever the emotion, accept it and allow it to move through you.

RETURN TO THE BREATH Your breath will keep you anchored to the present moment. If your mind starts to drift away, gently bring it back to your breath until the waves of emotion start to become calmer or for as long as you feel comfortable.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF When you give yourself time and space to truly feel, you can open up blocked energy, transforming negative emotions into positive energy.

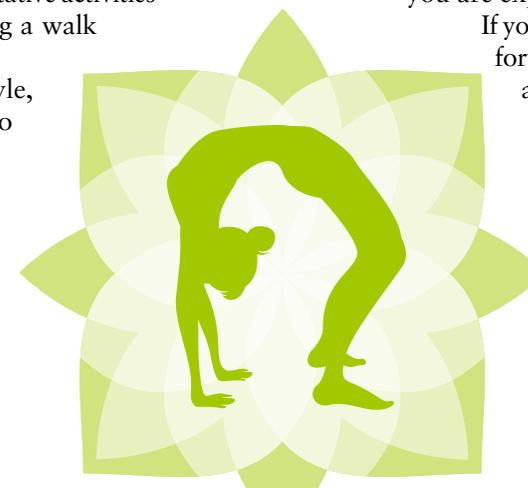
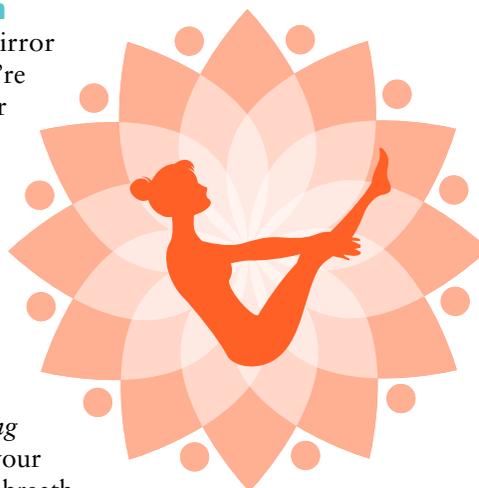
valuable information that our emotional energy might show us. Unresolved emotions that linger are toxic and a risk factor to our health.”

Match Your Practice to Your Mood

Bruce recommends carefully tailoring poses and breathing exercises to the intensity and quality of the emotions you are experiencing in this moment.

If you are upset, angry or anxious, forward bends can be calming, and gentle twists can wring out negative emotions.

Making your exhale twice the length of your inhale can also have a calming effect and help you let go of pent up feelings. Bruce suggests breathing exercises such as Alternate-Nostril Breathing



Unresolved emotions that linger are toxic and a risk factor to our health."

—Bija Bennett

(Nadi Shodhana) to regulate the right and left hemispheres of the brain or the Cooling Breath (Sitali) to soothe fiery emotions and restore balance.

If you are feeling sad, lethargic or bored, you can elevate your energy by doing backbends or breathwork such as Breath of Fire (Kapalabhati) or Bellows Breath (Bhastrika).

Transform Your Negative Emotions

"Yoga brings the unconscious to the surface," says Bruce. It's the process of rearranging energy, so it becomes more available to you in a healthy way." If you take time to fully experience your emotions, they can be transformed into more positive energy. For example, fear can be transformed into trust, courage or a feeling of protection; grief can be cultivated into acceptance or gratitude; and anger can be transformed into more peace, patience or compassion.

When your energy flows freely, you feel lighter, more relaxed and more fully present.

"If you can stay steady with your breath and you can stay steady in your mind, then you can have a discerning eye to ride the wave or be a

Wet, Wild, and Windy

by Bija Bennett

When you look at waves from a distance they almost look still.

Get right down in there and they are deep and daring.

One right after the other.

Breaking wildly

turbulent with abandon, with meaning.

Your feelings, when you don't look at them, when you hide

from a distance, they seem to disappear.

And all that is left are your mind-born waves

from where you cease to feel.

Don't be afraid to feel.

Drop yourself into your raging-waves.

You can ride them.

You can cross the sea.

It's unfathomable.

Be deep and daring.

Stay with your breathing.

And get right down in there.

Feel what it feels like to be tossed around

by what you really feel.

Run to the ocean. Meet yourself there.

Many unaware ones never know that the wet, wild and windy waves

that feel and heal can surely save you.

Roam your boundless sea.

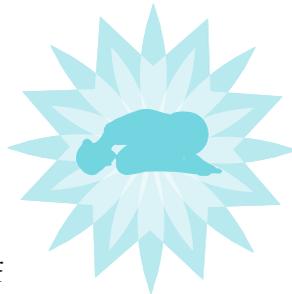
Reprinted with permission from Bija Bennett, author of *Breathing into Life: Recovering Wholeness through Body, Mind & Breath*. Website: Bijab.com

witness to what is occurring and to not get overwhelmed by it," says Bruce.

The next time you feel tears well up or a feeling of agitation wash over you, try staying with your breath and ride the wave of emotion until it smooths out, bringing healing to both your body and mind.

Angela Ambrose is a Phoenix-based writer with 28 years in magazine, corporate and video scriptwriting. As an ACE-certified group fitness instructor and certified yoga teacher, she combines her writing expertise with her passion for healthy living. The emotional release and the tears that often soak our yoga mats are one of the sweetest gifts yoga has to offer, says Angela, making us feel more open, alive and connected to the world around us.

Contact her at AngelaAmbrose.com or on Twitter [@AAHealthFitness](https://twitter.com/AAHealthFitness).



Ocean-Sounding Breath

One of the simplest yet most powerful types of yogic breathing is the Ujjayi Breath, also known as the Ocean-Sounding or Victorious Breath. Use the following steps to cultivate this foundational breath on or off the mat. It can help regulate the nervous system, balance emotions, increase your focus and build internal heat.

1) *Imagine you are fogging up a mirror with your breath. Open your mouth and softly make the "Ha" sound using a mild constriction in the back of your throat.*

2) *Close your mouth and breathe slowly and evenly in and out through your nose, creating the gentle sound of ocean waves as your breath brushes lightly against the back of your throat.*

3) *As you continue to make this smooth, steady sound, keep your inhalation and exhalation the same length.*



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