

# *Yoga with Anne-Marie*

## **THE ENLIGHTENED ATHLETE.**

### **CYCLING - CAN YOU LEAVE THE RACE AND COME BACK STRONGER?**

BY ANNE-MARIE NEWLAND

Guy is an extremely hardworking and dedicated athlete. After 'retiring' from cycle racing, it seems Guy tried all sorts of exercise regimes to attempt to rehabilitate his body.

Cycling is known to be one of the toughest sports on the body and aging can be seen visibly due to a very strict diet that is high in protein and very low fat combined with relentless training.

YOU HAVE TO LOVE IT TO STAY WITH IT!

In this last year, I have seen Guy 'battle' with tight joints, tight muscles and a tight mind!

A professional competitor competes every second of every waking moment and when asleep too, I am sure.

NOTHING IS LEFT TO THE EBB AND FLOW.

It was with this mindset that I saw how difficult it might be for Guy to respond to yoga. He was impatient and wanted results 'yesterday'.

I often had to remind him that yoga was non-competitive and that he needed to focus on his breath and therefore relaxing before he could really begin to respond to his yoga practice.

This was so very hard for Guy and it was with real commitment that he carried on as he did week in, week out to master the most fundamental of all human needs; the breath.

WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT THE BREATH AND YET WE GIVE IT LITTLE OR NO RESPECT.

When first coming to a yoga class, people want to know what it is and how to categorise it.

YOGA IS THE BREATH THAT CONNECTS YOUR BODY YOUR MIND AND YOUR INNER SPACE.

And usually if they are young they will giggle!

This seems to be a normal reaction when we are confronted with anything that may make us stop and think about more than just the sensation of exercise.

Most of us are never aware of our bodies unless we hurt ourselves, unless we bleed or are made to stay in bed and then we become 'patients'.

Interesting word, have you thought about it?

PATIENT - STOP STILL AND BE AWARE. TAKE TIME TO HEAL.

When I take a new student through their first class we talk about the awareness we need to keep us in-touch with ourselves.

You see 'IN-TOUCH' - there is another phrase we say without thinking. Being aware of our bodies and minds when we are **well** is my aim as a teacher.

BEING AT-EASE WITH OURSELVES AND UNDERSTANDING DIS-EASE WHEN WE ARE NOT IN BALANCE.

This is what my duty as a teacher is, in my opinion.

It is with this breathe-consciousness that we attain such a unique relationship with our very deepest inner world.

I knew that once Guy was able to feel the breath and feel the results, his body would begin to illustrate the mental picture he had seen and to dance freely with the knowledge that the mind was the architect, and the body the sculpture.

Our classes were in the style of Sivananda yoga and this beautiful style was exactly what Guy needed. Not a strong yoga like power yoga but a releasing, yielding, classical yoga which is still my personal favourite because it changes lives in such a subtle yet profound way.

We started our practice with:

- Khapalabhati Diaphragmic Breathing
- Anoloma Viloma Alternate Nostril Breathing
- The Sun Salute

We continued our practice staying close to Sivananda's 12 basic postures:

1. headstand/half headstand
2. shoulder stand
3. plough
4. fish
5. head to knee pose
6. cobra
7. locust
8. bow
9. spinal twist

10. crow
11. head to knee pose
12. triangle

This is, and always will be, in my mind a balanced session for any of us. Obviously, some of us may be unable to manage a few things like the headstand or the crow, well never mind, it's not the end of the world. For some, like Guy, the shoulder-stand was the most challenging [because his upper body is very tight from cycling] but he has managed it.

We all celebrate with him, in all his endeavours and in his re-fired career in the saddle.

## **GUY'S STORY.**

Having quit the sport of cycling during the 1986 continental season for several reasons some of which were well published in the press at the time! I decided to experiment with yoga and its philosophy some 18 months ago.

During my racing career I rarely if ever felt in full control of the pressures associated within the sport e.g. competition, sponsors, team directors etc. Yoga has given me the chance to understand self-control through bodily awareness and that all-important 'souplesse' that a machine orientated sport by its nature takes away.

Yoga has been a path of re-education for myself and for my body. Breathing being a very important part of yoga (and life!) brings back the control aspect needed in any physical activity, none more so than in cycling. This was the first and hardest step to master in yoga, it being fundamental in its application and powerful when efficiently employed. The next challenge was to use my muscle powerfully, to which nature had originally intended. Something that during my time racing had not been explained was so important. Neither in the UK nor on the continent, surrounded by so-called experts had my training helped me to understand the connection between mind and body.

It has therefore been a refreshing change to learn through my yoga class how to treat your body and psyche with a great deal more respect, something sadly lacking within international sport.

The confidence to commit to yoga was never really an issue with me, any tradition of dynamic exercise that has endured centuries of devout followers such as yoga has, was endorsement enough. I doubt the same will be true of other static based exercise disciplines in the years to come. Such an irony that yoga should then lead me back into the sport of cycling and competition but with a great deal more knowledge and understanding of myself and my body.

I will continue to explore through yoga, in the meantime within cycle sport I have some unfinished business

ANNE-MARIE IS TAKING A BREAK THIS SUMMER AND WILL BE BACK IN THE AUTUMN ISSUE TO RELAY TO YOU SOME OF HER MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE YOGI ATHLETES.

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