

# Oceanic flow

Move through life effortlessly with the fluidity of yoga



The ocean is a powerful, beautiful, intoxicating force of nature. Its vastness presents mystery, challenge, and immense wonder to the observer. There is something about this huge body of water that appeals to each of us on a deep and primal level.

Perhaps it's not that surprising. Our bodies are heavily water-based; drinking water is a fundamental part of our daily dietary intake. Little wonder then that we feel some deep connection, a magnetic draw, to the great oceans of this world. That extends also to other large expanses of water, from the peaceful lakes of the interior, to the mighty rivers that flow through jungles, or that bring life to the world's arid, desert regions. Water, with all its shape-shifting qualities, is quite literally the difference between life and death on this planet. Without it, there would be no talk of evolution, nor religion, no yoga for that matter either; there would be no life at all. And we can learn from something so precious. If our bodies can reflect the effortless dynamics of water, then perhaps we can learn to navigate the myriad challenges of life more gracefully. Just as water will always find its way around obstacles, we too can learn to 'go with the flow'.

## The Odaka philosophy

Indeed, there are some yoga styles that already embrace this flowing philosophy. Italian yoga teacher Roberto Milletti grew up by the sea and now brings this wave-like fluidity into his Odaka Yoga style (odaka.it). "I always like to observe the movement of the water. I grew up near the ocean, spending my free time sitting by the shore and being enthralled by the motion of the waves." He says water gave him an early understanding of how to be 'in the flow', to reach a state of

being in alignment with your truest self, your intentions, and that of nature surrounding you. You are 'in sync' with life, receiving the full support of the universe simply because you are not separate from it. It is a non-resistance state of infinite possibilities, he says.

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In the *Bhagavad Gita* - one of yoga's great texts - this concept is called *Naishkarmya*. When you work and live from 'the flow', you spontaneously act in the easiest and most effortless way. By aligning with this oceanic flow, this fluidity in motion, the human body is able to unwind constraint, fear or other long-standing patterns, and to replace them with increased strength and agility. Not only physically, but mentally and emotionally too.

## Go with the flow

And it is easy to bring this amazing fluidity into all areas of your life, reckons Milletti. Odaka's physical movements target the body's core centre of gravity, an area that is both stable and fluid, all at the same time. They also prompt emotional flexibility, by opening up the

person to endless, new possibilities. "By putting itself into this flow, the body finds itself slowly in the midst of the continuous motion between contraction and relaxation, two opposite expressions that complement each other," he says. It expresses *Samatva*, or 'balance' in Sanskrit.

**"It is possible to swim upstream, of course, but it is exhausting," he says. "If only we could stop pushing and flow along with the river of life, it would reward us effortlessly. So don't push the river but let yourself flow with it."**

There is a clear link between such wave dynamics and a human being's natural rhythms, and the effects on blood, lymphatic flow and cerebrospinal fluid. On a technical level, the technique that replicates the motion of the waves triggers the pubococcygeus muscle along with the perineum and pelvic floor. *Samatva* is created by the force of the pelvic and perineal muscles, which, by reflex, activate those of the abdomen. It all helps create a spinal column that is free to flourish, dilate and become more flexible all the way to the deeper connective tissues, thereby increasing tone and elasticity. "Asana practice is a process of being present in the moment with an abiding sense of freedom and wholeness that brings about an experience of being fully alive, energised and in bliss," says Milletti. Making the transition as important as the pose itself is an integral part of the Odaka practice.

## A quiet mind

There is a beautiful concept in the Yoga Sutras, *Parinamavada*, the understanding that constant change is an inherent part of the cause and effect nature of life. To step into *Parinamavada* we use the concept of moving from the centre (*tanden*), expressing circular movements. This allows us to be rooted yet ready to transform and adapt. And, when we let our minds flow like water, we can face life with a calmer, quieter disposition.

Over thinking and over analysing separates the mind from the body. Change is going to happen, whether we like it or not, says Milletti, but struggling against the changes life brings is not going to achieve anything but stress and frustration. "If we go with the flow



we become fluid and flexible. Taking on a free-flowing attitude allows us to be like water. Water is the most powerful substance, able to remove the biggest of obstacles and to pass through seemingly impossible spaces."

Conversely, being rigid in beliefs and inflexible in attitude means we are unable to flow with life. And if we do not bend, we are more likely to break. Imagine throwing a pebble into a still pond. How does the water respond? The answer is: totally appropriately to the force and mass of the input; then it returns to calm. It doesn't overreact or under-react. "When you are rigid, it's easy to crack under pressure and strain. Rarely can you overcome your problems through sheer willpower alone," says Milletti.

## Don't push the river

So, whenever you face a problem, remember to flow like water; be formless, yielding and adaptable. Learning to move, to think, and to 'be' like the mighty oceans, is a talent worth pursuing. As American yoga legend Shiva Rea once famously commented: "Don't push the river."

To 'go with the flow', says Milletti, means to stop trying to swim against the tide of life circumstances and resistance to change. "It is possible to swim upstream, of course, but it is exhausting," he says. "If only we could stop pushing and flow along with the river of life, it would reward us effortlessly. So don't push the river but let yourself flow with it."

## Resistance is futile

*"Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them - that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like."* Lao Tzu. ॐ