

PRACTICE

Yin Yoga: Long Holds, Real Roots, Honest Limits

Where yin yoga really comes from, what research says about fascia, and 24 held postures in three timed sequences of 30, 45 and 60 minutes



योग

yoga

YOGIDE

Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions: administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

In a yin class, almost nothing happens. You fold forward on the floor, let the arms rest, and stay. One minute. Three. Five. The room is quiet; the teacher says very little. Then you come out slowly, lie still for a breath or two, and go into the next shape. After an hour you have done perhaps ten postures, and you feel as if you had been somewhere far away.

Yin yoga is one of the most practised styles in the world, and one of the most misunderstood. It is sold as "ancient Taoist yoga", as the "original" yoga of India, as a way to "lengthen your fascia" and "unblock your meridians". None of these phrases is quite true. This book does four things we have not found together anywhere else.

It tells the documented history. Yin yoga was shaped in North America between the late 1970s and the end of the 1990s by a martial artist (Paulie Zink), a yoga teacher trained in anatomy (Paul Grilley), a Japanese researcher of the subtle body (Hiroshi Motoyama) and a teacher of yoga and Buddhist meditation (Sarah Powers), who gave it its name. Names, dates, sources, and where sources disagree.

It separates what comes from India from what comes from elsewhere. The long, still seat, the withdrawal of the senses and Patañjali's "steady and easy" posture are Indian, quoted here in Sanskrit with our own translations. Yin and yang and the meridians are Chinese. The anatomy-based method is modern and Western. All three are honourable; none should be passed off as another.

It is honest about research. What do long holds do to connective tissue? Chapter 5 summarises studies checked one by one on PubMed: what they show, how strong they are, what they do not show.

It gives you a complete practice: 24 postures with their yin name and their Sanskrit equivalent when one exists (with the card number in our Asana Atlas), entry, hold, exit, an easier version and precautions; then **three sequences of 30, 45 and 60 minutes**, minute by minute, with breathing and meditation suited to yin.

About the translations.

All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation.

Health first.

This book is not medical advice. Long holds look gentle but load joints, ligaments and the spine for minutes at a time. Talk to your doctor or physiotherapist first if you are pregnant or have recently given birth; if you have osteoporosis or osteopenia, joint hypermobility or a connective-tissue disorder, a joint replacement, a recent injury or surgery, a disc problem or sciatica, glaucoma, uncontrolled high blood pressure or a heart condition. Come out of a posture at once for sharp, burning or electric pain, tingling or numbness. Stop and seek help for chest pain, breathlessness out of proportion, faintness, or sudden weakness on one side. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India). Chapter 10 gives the precautions in full.

How the texts are numbered

- **Yoga Sūtra (YS)**: GRETIL electronic text (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages); the numbers quoted (1.14, 2.46-2.48, 2.54) are the same in all usual editions.
- **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**: GRETIL text, version of 31 July 2020. HYP 1.19, the one verse quoted in full, has the same number in the public-domain translation by Pancham Sinh (1914); some modern editions number it 1.17.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 5 once: an evening's reading that will change what you expect from a long hold. Read Chapters 4 and 10 before your first session. Learn the postures of Chapter 6 a few at a time, and practise the 30-minute sequence for two weeks before the longer ones. Keep the journal of Chapter 11: noting what you feel, where and for how long is the most useful habit in yin.

Chapter 1. Paulie Zink, Paul Grilley, Sarah Powers: the documented history

A style with a birth certificate

Most styles taught today have a founder and a date: Ashtanga vinyasa goes back to K. Pattabhi Jois in Mysore, Iyengar yoga to B. K. S. Iyengar in Pune. Yin yoga is no exception, and its history is short enough to be told precisely. Several of the people who shaped it wrote down their own account. We do not need legends.

Our sources: the online book YinSights by Bernie Clark, a Canadian teacher who learned from Grilley and Powers and wrote the most detailed history of the style; Paul Grilley's website; the website of Sarah and Ty Powers; and an article on Paulie Zink's style in the British Yoga Magazine (around 2012). Where they disagree, we say so.

Paulie Zink: Taoist yoga in the martial arts world (late 1970s onward)

Paulie Zink is an American martial-arts champion and a teacher of what he calls Taoist yoga, which he began teaching in North America in the late 1970s, first to martial artists. The presentation of his style in Yoga Magazine calls it "a synthesis Paulie Zink created by combining Hatha yoga and several disciplines from the Daoist tradition", with animal-based postures, movements and vocalisations he developed himself, qìgōng and inner alchemy.

Three points matter for this book.

1. **Zink's art is not only still.** It contains yin postures (still, relaxed) and yang postures (strenuous), linked by a flowing, circular movement; he later called the whole "Yin and Yang Yoga". Most studios today keep only the still part.
2. **"Taoist yoga" is a modern phrase.** Bernie Clark notes that its first occurrence was probably the title of a book by Charles Luk (Lu K'uan Yü, 1898-1978), Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality. Clark dates it 1973; catalogues give Rider, London, 1970. Clark also quotes the Daoist scholar Louis Komjathy, for whom the label is a misnomer, since there is no "yoga" as such in Daoism.
3. **Zink's synthesis is his own**, which is no criticism: every teacher shapes what he received.

Paul Grilley: anatomy, Zink's classes, Motoyama (1979 to the 1990s)

Clark adapts Grilley's path from Grilley's own book:

- In 1979 Grilley began studying yoga after reading Paramahansa Yogananda's Autobiography of a Yogi.
- He studied anatomy for two years with Dr Gary Parker in Montana, then moved to Los Angeles to study at UCLA, where he practised and taught Ashtanga, and ran a studio of the style founded by Bikram

Choudhury.

- He saw Paulie Zink in a televised martial-arts interview, contacted him and joined his classes. Clark dates this first encounter with long-held postures to **1989**.
- He then met **Hiroshi Motoyama**: in **1990** according to Clark, in **1989** according to the English Wikipedia article on yin yoga. The sources do not settle it.
- Through Motoyama he connected floor postures with the meridians of Chinese medicine, and went to Japan to study with him.
- His book ***Yin Yoga: Outline of a Quiet Practice*** (White Cloud Press, **2002**) made the approach known; a revised version, *Yin Yoga: Principles and Practice*, followed in 2012 from the same publisher. In 2005 he received an honorary doctorate from the California Institute of Human Science, founded by Motoyama.

Two of Grilley's ideas became central to the style. First, "yang" practice works mainly the muscles, through movement, while "yin" practice targets the connective tissues (ligaments, joint capsules, fascia) through long, passive holds with the muscles relaxed. Second, **bones differ from one person to another**: the shape of the hip socket or the angle of the thigh bone sets limits that no practice will change. His website still offers photographs of skeletons for that purpose, and describes "five yin archetypes" (shoelace, saddle, caterpillar, dragonfly, twist) of which most floor poses are variations. The second idea is well supported by anatomy; the first is a hypothesis, examined in Chapter 5.

Hiroshi Motoyama: the meridians and the chakras (1925-2015)

Hiroshi Motoyama (15 December 1925 - 19 September 2015) was a Japanese scholar, a Shinto priest and a researcher of what he called the subtle body. He wrote on the chakras, on ki (the Japanese reading of the Chinese qì) and on the meridians, designed instruments intended to measure the functioning of the meridians, and founded research institutes in Japan and in California.

He gave Grilley, and later Sarah Powers, a framework that tied floor postures to the meridians. The habit of saying that a pose "works" a given channel comes from there. We present it as what it is: the theory of a respected teacher of the subtle body, not an anatomical finding.

Sarah Powers: the name, and the turn towards meditation (1990s)

Sarah Powers, who came to yoga while studying psychology and then taught a dynamic style in Malibu, first tried a class of Grilley's after an Ashtanga class, loved the long holds, and left them aside. Years later, on a ten-day vipassanā retreat in Asia, she found sitting for an hour excruciating, returned to Grilley's practice, and found that it changed her ability to sit (Clark's account).

Two of her contributions shaped the style:

1. **The name.** Clark states that "it was actually Sarah Powers who coined the term 'Yin Yoga' that is commonly used today". Grilley first called his practice Taoist yoga; Zink later adopted "Yin Yoga" as a short form of "Yin and Yang Yoga".
2. **Meditation.** With her husband Ty Powers, she joined the long holds to mindfulness and inquiry from Buddhist traditions, and to a flowing yang practice; her book *Insight Yoga* appeared in 2008. Clark credits her with the three rules most yin teachers repeat: **come into the pose to an appropriate depth**,

resolve to remain still, hold the pose for time. Chapter 4 is built on them.

Bernie Clark's YinSights (2007), freely readable on his website, and his later Complete Guide to Yin Yoga spread this teaching widely. In September 2009 the Los Angeles Times already described the style as "quietly on the rise".

A short timeline

Date	Event	Source
168 BCE	Mawangdui Tomb 3 (China) sealed, with a silk chart of dǎoyīn exercises	Wikipedia, "Daoyin"
1970	Charles Luk, Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality (London, Rider)	Open Library catalogue (Clark gives 1973)
Late 1970s	Paulie Zink teaches Taoist yoga in North America	Wikipedia, "Yin Yoga"; Yoga Magazine
1989	Grilley attends Zink's classes	Clark
1989 or 1990	Grilley meets Hiroshi Motoyama	Wikipedia (1989); Clark (1990)
1990s	Sarah Powers practises with Grilley and names the style	Clark
2002	Grilley, Yin Yoga: Outline of a Quiet Practice	ISBN 978-1-883991-43-2
2015	Death of Hiroshi Motoyama (19 September)	Clark; Wikipedia

Practise: your starting point

Sit on a cushion for three minutes without moving. Note where the body asked to move, after how long, and what you did.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 43 pages.

Get it here: <https://yogide.com/books/yin-yoga-long-holds-real-roots-honest-limits/>

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