

Embodying Yield: Aligning the Body with Ground, Gravity & Space
with Donna Farhi
 Resource Handout

AYUR MANTRA

A mantra for health and nourishment
 From the Tattiriya Aranyaka IV.2

Om āyur¹ dhehi prānaṃ¹ dhēhi

(May my life be nourished. May the upward flow of energy be nourished.)

Om, apānaṃ¹ dhēhi vyāhaṃ¹ dhēhi

(May the downward flow and the circulating flow of energy be nourished.)

Om cakṣur¹ dhehi śrotraṃ¹ dhehi

(May my sight and hearing be nourished)

Om manó¹ dhehi vācāṃ¹ dhehi

(May my mind be nourished and my speech nourishing)

Om ātmānaṃ¹ dhehi pratiṣṭhāṃ¹ dhēhi

(May my soul be nourished. May I rest in that nourishment.)

Om māṃ¹ dhēhi mayi¹ dhehi

(May I be nourished and through that nourishment bring pleasure to others.)

To hear an audio recording of Donna leading the Ayur Mantra go to:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q30-jT7iLCE>

The Book of Hours, *Wenn st̄was mir vom Fenster fällt (II.16)**

Rilke



How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the smallest thing
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.

Each thing—
each stone, blossom, child—
is held in place.
Only we, in our arrogance,
push out beyond what we each belong to
for some empty freedom.

If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.

Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.

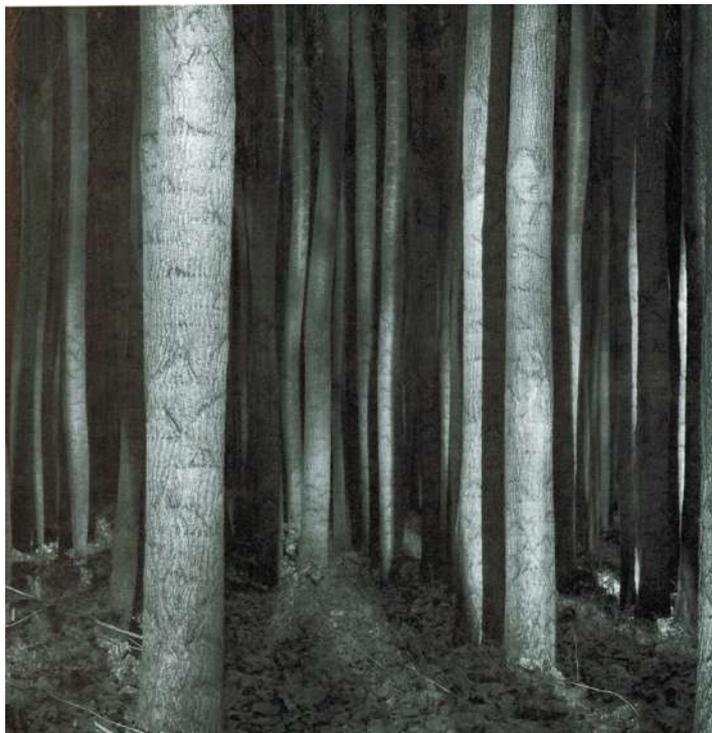
So, like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart:
they have never left him.

This is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.

* *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, Riverhead Books, New York, 1996

THE WAY THE FOREST SHELTERS

Rabia*



I know about love the way the fields know about light,
the way the forest shelters,

the way an animal's divine raw desire seeks to unite with
whatever might please its soul—without a single
strange thought
of remorse.

There is a powerful delegation in us that
lobbies every moment for
contentment.

How will you ever find peace
unless you yield to love

the way the gracious earth
does to our hand's
impulse.

* Translated by Daniel Ladinsky from *Love Poems From God*

Rabia of Basra (c.717-801) was a female Islamic saint and a central figure in the Sufi tradition. She was born nearly five hundred years before Rumi. While young she was separated from her parents and wandering homeless was stolen and sold into slavery. It was believed that she lived and was forced to work in a brothel for many years. . . when she was about fifty she was given her freedom and the remaining years of her life were devoted to meditation and prayer . . . many miracles were attributed to her.

The Collapse, Yield, Prop Continuum

*“The weight you release into the Earth comes back in equal measure as support.”
~ Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen¹*

Each pattern of relationship has a physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual component to its’ expression.

Collapse: Everything is going down

- Passively giving weight to the ground
- Lack of cohesion and sufficient tension within the structure to create a trellis of support for the rebound of gravity
- Weight is “dropped” into the joints causing compression
- Posture is maintained through leaning into ligamental tissues while musculature remains flaccid
- No collective agreement between the parts of the body and the whole or their relationship to the ground, gravity and space
- Emotional patterning of self-negation, self-pity, inertia
- Breathing is shallow, laboured, lethargic and intermittent – sighing and yawning to recover.

Propping is characterized by: Everything is going up

- Actively lifting the weight of the body away from the earth
- Excess of body tension that prevents a connection with the earth
- Weight is “lifted” upwards in the upper body, chest, shoulders and neck
- Accomplished through “push & push” which requires ongoing effort which is usually followed by a return to the pattern of collapse to recover
- Triggers a sympathetic “fight, flight or freeze” response which is reflected in the breath through secondary respiratory muscle breathing: high in the chest and neck
- Emotional patterning: “holding the self” up and embodying the separate self, unable to trust the support of the earth

Yielding is characterized by: Balance of Downward and Upward Force

- Actively giving weight with positive body tension creates a trellis of support for gravity to rebound through the body upwards into space
- Perfect body tonicity: nothing more or less than is required
- Yield underlies push underlies reach
- In yielding the weight is born by the bones, supported by activation of the muscles
- Self-renewing: thus efficient, easeful and sustainable
- Allows for unimpeded flow of fluids and movement in the body: ease in breath
- Parasympathetic N.S. and Enteric N.S. response supports continuous rhythmic breathing.
- Emotional patterning: trust in ourselves, in the world, and the ground through which we experience real connection with others.

¹ *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Contact Editions, Northampton, MA, 1993

Further Inquiries:

- What dynamic qualities need to be in place for yielding to occur?
- What are the sensations of yield?
- How do you organize yield in your body?
- Is there a mental, emotional, spiritual quality that accompanies yield?

References:

- **Music that may facilitate a sense of Yield:**
 - Hang Massive, Luminous Emptiness
 - Mystik Dance, El Hadre
- *The Breathing Book* by Donna Farhi, Henry Holt & Company, New York, New York, 1996
- *Yoga, Mind, Body & Spirit* by Donna Farhi, Henry Holt & Company, New York, New York, 2000
- V. Tibbetts, and E. Peper, “Effects of Imagery and Position of Breathing Patterns,” *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Association of Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* (Wheat Ridge, Colo.: AAPB 1996). In addition, these researchers found that bracing and respiration patterns could also be altered by *imagining* walking on a hard or soft surface. That is, one could increase or reduce the arousal response by imagining walking on a soft meadow or walking on a hard concrete surface.
- E. Peper, et al., “Repetitive Strain Injury: Prevent Computer Users Injury with Biofeedback: Assessment and Training Protocol,” *Electromyography Thought Technology*, 1994. This study showed that without kinesthetic awareness and without the skills to reduce tension, ergonomic adjustments with intermittent rest periods are not sufficient to reduce the risk of injury, especially repetitive strain injury (RSI) to computer users. That is, even with ideal work conditions, computer workers seem to brace inappropriately and excessively, accompanied by an increased rate of respiration and chest breathing. With training in kinesthetic awareness, computer users can change these unconscious habits.
- **WHO Breathing²:** “. . . take a normal inhalation through your nose, then on your exhalation gently purse your lips and make a *WHO* sound (like the sound you hear when listening to a seashell.) Imagine a candle flame just in front of you and that you are making the outgoing breath so gentle and smooth that it does not disturb the flame. Continue for ten breathes, breathing in through the nose and out through pursed lips. After ten breaths, let your breathing return to normal. Notice whether the quality of your breathing has changed. Has your exhalation become longer? Are your inhalations feeling fuller? Can you feel the thoracic diaphragm beginning to broaden the entire circumference of the rib cage? Now complete another ten sets of the *WHO* breath. During this round as you exhale, notice that the action of making the *WHO* sound is subtly activating the abdominal muscles. This gentle activation of the abdominal muscles tend to increase the length of the exhalation. Taking a *full exhalation* tends to provoke a *full inhalation*. Notice that after switching on your

² *Pathways to a Centered Body* by Donna Farhi & Leila Stuart, Embodied Wisdom Publishing, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2017, (page 45)

abdominal muscles during the exhalation, they remained switched on during the inhalation as well. This subtle activation of the abdominal muscles during inhalation is a hallmark of the type of breathing that supports core stability. Abracadabra . . . you are now taking a Diaphragmatic Breath.”

• **Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex:** “One of the first reflexes to develop underlies our bonding to the Earth. It is called the Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex, and it draws us towards the Earth by increasing the postural tone (a sense of aliveness and weightedness) of the muscles on the underside of the body. For example, if we are lying on our bellies, flexor tone is facilitated or increased; if we are lying on our backs, extensor tone is facilitated; and if we are lying on our sides, the tone of the underside is facilitated.”³

My specific reference in the workshop to the tonic labyrinthine reflex concerned the practice of Corpse Pose (Savasana). When lying on the back, the increased tonus in the back of the body elicits a Sympathetic N.S arousal and an accompanying sense of vigilance. By assuming a prone position for Corpse Pose, we increase the tonus in the front of the body. This tends to elicit a shift to the Parasympathetic N.S. and Enteric N.S (The Abdominal Brain or third branch of the nervous system). This is why Downward Facing Corpse Pose may be experienced as soothing, calming, and sedating. The two Restorative Yoga set-ups below may help facilitate a more comfortable experience of prone relaxation.

^{3 3} *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Contact Editions, Northampton, MA, 1993 (page 127)

- **Two Restorative Prop options for lying prone:**

- **With a bolster:** When using the bolster, starting by placing the top of the sternum on the edge of the bolster, then adjust the position of the folded blanket under the abdomen. The blanket should be positioned so that the tailbone is *slightly* lower than the sacrum. For people with lower back discomfort the blanket under the abdomen is essential. Place a pillow under the lower legs to take pressure off of the knees and to further assist ease in the lumbar spine. Finally, using 1-2 folded towels, support the forehead so that the neck and head are just slightly lower than the thoracic spine.



- **With 2 blankets:** This set up can be helpful for people with larger abdomens or simply as an alternative to using a bolster. The sternum rests on the edge of the blankets where they meet and the two sides of the pelvis are supported on the blankets with the abdomen free in between. The pillow supports the lower legs. I have rolled a towel to form a head rest: you can lie with the head facing downwards or turn the head with one side of the head resting on the left or right towel roll. As with all restorative propping, if it's not comfortable, it's not right, so be willing to experiment with additional blankets, decreasing the diameter of the head rest towel roll or using other supports such as two pillows.



To receive regular newsletters on Donna's events please register at www.donnafarhi.co.nz

Donna also has a private Facebook Group which you can request to join here: [Donna Farhi Yoga Room](#)