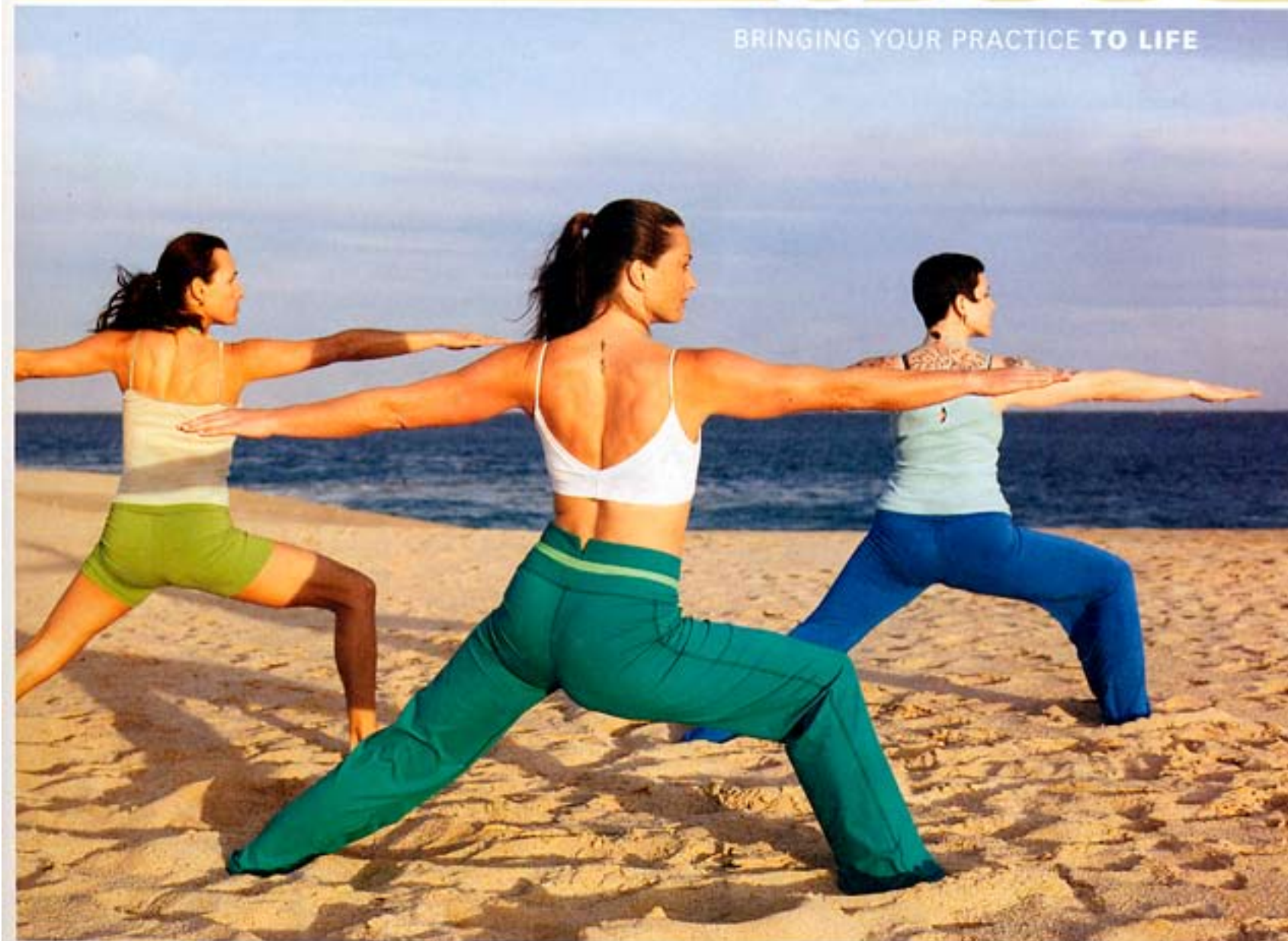


ॐ Om

BRINGING YOUR PRACTICE TO LIFE



sun, sand, and samadhi

Take your yoga to the beach this summer and reconnect with nature.

GREEN YOGA

CAN BURYING YOUR FRIENDS IN THE SAND be a form of yoga? According to Russell Comstock, a yoga teacher and outdoor adventure educator based in Essex, New York, the answer is “absolutely.” At a conference organized by the Green Yoga Association last September, Comstock and his wife, Gillian Kapteyn Comstock, a psychotherapist, yoga teacher, and wilderness guide, led an “Ocean Yoga” day for nearly 25 participants. The group practiced asanas in front of the waves, searched for stones and pebbles to create devotional altars, and buried each other in the sand in Savasana (Corpse Pose) to encourage *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal).

“It was a total blast,” says Russell, 43, who is working toward a master’s degree in contemplative ecological leadership. “My belief is that many aspects of yoga have a connection to nature, whether it’s focusing on our breath—which contains molecules of air from all over the globe—performing postures that mimic ☸

real world yoga

challenge

sun, sand, and samadhi

animals or elements of nature, or bringing a yogic awareness to the food we eat." That link to the environment, he says, is not often actively taught. And that's where classes like Ocean Yoga come in. "Yoga on the beach is a wonderful way for people to reconnect with a sense of joy and wonder."

But the Comstocks aren't stopping there. They recently established the Metta Earth Institute on a several-hundred-acre farm in New York's Adirondack Mountains. In addition to hatha yoga and meditation classes, the small eco-school will offer sustainable-living programs that teach organic gardening, small-scale farming, permaculture principles, and green building techniques. One of the center's first programs is a 10-day course, available through the University of Vermont, that combines yoga, ecology, and art. The couple will also practice what they preach by making green choices while building and powering the farm with solar electricity. "We want to model what we teach," Russell says. SHARON GOLDMAN

To turn your summer beach break into a tranquil yoga experience, try these tips from the Comstocks.

SEEK SANCTUARY Find a spot on the beach where you feel comfortable and you won't be distracted, says Russell Comstock. "Tune in to your breath and begin to quiet your mind."

FOLLOW YOUR FASCINATIONS If you'd rather move than sit, allow the sounds of the ocean to help you in a walking meditation. Start walking without strongly identifying with any one thing. Let your thoughts, or what Comstock calls "fascinations," come and go as the waves do.

STAND STRONG You don't have to get uncomfortably sandy to enjoy asanas on the beach, Comstock says. "Standing postures offer an incredible opportunity to really dig your feet into the poses."

For more information, check out www.mettaearth.org

"I always finish yoga class feeling blissful, but as soon as I walk out into the street, the joy starts to fade. How can I hold on to it?"

response

The simple answer is, you can't. But don't despair. Paradoxically, the best way to feel more of the happiness you experience from your class is to pay close attention to the times you don't feel it. Notice the thoughts you're having at such times, and hold them with compassion. As you're able to do this more and more, you'll find that you've created a space inside for joy to arise on its own, unconnected to external events. And that's a feeling you can count on.

JUDITH HANSON LASATER

ocean yoga meditation

This guided meditation is intended to raise your awareness and ignite curiosity about the world around you. Read it quietly to yourself on the beach before you meditate, have a friend read it to you, or record your voice and play it back to yourself.

MEDITATION

In the body lives an ocean
Open into the sea of sensations.
With breath coming and going
waves rise and fall.
Currents of awareness
surface from depths.
Find nourishment for the soul.

Thoughts scatter across
wild mind
shells on a tidal flat.
Sweep away with wave
of breath.

Encrusted,
the mind clings to identity
as barnacles bind to host.
Release into stillness
in fathoms deep.



Bright air fills lungs
with oxygen of teeming life.
Breathe in the salty Source.

Amid changing sands
of circumstance
dune grass holds fast.
Embrace this simple sense
of place.

RUSSELL COMSTOCK