As a Yoga teacher and environmental educator I have come to believe that Green Yoga is a spiritual, ecological practice in which we can nourish our bodies and spirits while also supporting a sustainable future.

Ecology is the study of the relationships between organisms and their environment. Yoga practice can take us deeply into an exploration of how we relate to ourselves and our world. In Yoga, we cultivate our personal awareness by attending closely to our physical sensations and emotions as we practice. Connecting intimately to ourselves in this way is the first step in becoming aware of our interdependence with all beings. When we bring this awareness into the rest of our lives, we experience how Yoga can become a path that supports environmental activism.

Every Yoga posture has something to teach us. Standing on our head in Headstand (Shirshasana) lets us experience our relationship with the Earth in a new way. When we turn ourselves upside down in Headstand for the first time, it is common to encounter feelings of fear, uncertainty and disorientation. “Where are my feet relative to my balance point? What happens if I fall over?” As we repeat the pose and face these feelings freshly each time, we are in effect practicing becoming comfortable with risk. When we do this over and over, our fears can lessen or drop away entirely so that we can relate to the world from a stance of trust and connection.

On one particularly memorable occasion I lifted up into Headstand and was seized by the fear of failure. I was terrified of falling over, getting hurt, or making a mess of myself. As I stayed in the posture, attending closely to the physical sensations of fear, I realized that my fear was causing me to constrict my energy and strength. I was trying to stay in control by holding on, but in effect was holding myself back from the fullness of my potential in the posture. Through perseverance and focus I realized that if I lost my balance and began to fall, I could just roll over, come up and try it again. As I continued my daily practice of Headstand, I came to understand that the same fears — of failure, of looking messy, and of not being successful — were holding me back in other areas of my life.

It was fear that had curtailed my ability to stand up and take risks. I hadn’t been willing for instance, to speak my honest opinion in certain groups, even among groups of friends. My fear had prevented me from challenging the status quo in community meetings where I longed to advocate for an environmental issue that was important to me.

It was my daily practice of Headstand, done with careful attention, that freed me from my fears and enabled me to become a vocal and active advocate for environmental issues in my neighborhood. As a result, I decided to join the committee that was responsible for the design of a newly proposed building. We explored issues around the building’s energy efficiency and researched wind power. Steps are now being taken to install a wind generator.

I learned some vitally important things about myself in Headstand, and then took this discovery out into the rest of my life, where it transformed my relationship to the people around me, to my community, and to my local environment.

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**CAN THE PRACTICE of Yoga postures help to cultivate ecological consciousness?**

**Might Yoga encourage and inspire us toward environmental activism?**

These are questions that come up for me often in my exploration of Yoga and ecology...