

# Yoga with a Friend



***Develop trust, communication, strength, and compassion when you practice yoga with a partner***

By Kimberlee Jensen Stedl and Todd Stedl, Ph.D.

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Christopher Williams

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*To my husband, for helping me grow into a better person  
each day.*

*To my wife, whose love gives me the courage to explore  
bold ideas.*



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# Disclaimer

This book is for self-knowledge and is not a substitute for consulting with a physician or physical therapist. Please consult your physician before beginning a new physical conditioning program, especially if you have a pre-existing condition for which you are being treated or you have been inactive for a long period of time. All the poses in this book assume the reader is physically capable of these poses; however they do carry risks and only you and your health care providers can say what poses work and do not work for your body at this point in time.

Women who are pregnant must consult with their physician before practicing yoga poses and are advised to take a pre-natal yoga class instead of doing a general yoga practice. People recovering from injuries should consult with their doctor or their physical therapist as certain poses may aggravate an injury and delay healing. We strongly advise taking this book with you to your physicians and asking them to select the appropriate poses for you, especially if you have a known condition for which you see a physician or take medication regularly.

*The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.*

—William Wordsworth



# Introduction

Practicing yoga with a friend creates a new dynamic. You use yoga not only to connect with your own body and mind, but also to connect with someone else. We have found that practicing together helps us maintain a healthy marriage. In fact, when outside stresses get the best of us, we find that practicing yoga together helps us draw strength from our union and better enables us to show gratitude for having each other in our lives.

Sharing your practice with a partner is an act of *aparigraha* (non-greediness). If you have been practicing solo for years, it may take some time to adapt, but you will soon find its rewards. We believe this practice has all the normal benefits of yoga: strength, flexibility, peacefulness, and mindfulness, but adds another dimension of developing compassion for and empathy with your friend.

Numerous yoga styles abound. In this book, we have approached the poses from the *Hatha* yoga philosophy. *Hatha* fuses the words for sun and moon in Sanskrit and it essentially means balancing aggressive sun energy with receptive moon energy. In your physical pose practice, you do this by doing both vigorous poses, such as Two Sided Plank, and relaxing poses, such as Open Cobbler's. *Hatha* yoga is also an umbrella term for numerous other styles. In addition, we applied some principles of *Vinyasa* yoga, which denotes flowing from pose to pose with the breath. *Vinyasa* yoga is a subset of *Hatha* yoga.

In fact, we view practicing with a partner as a great way to balance aggressive and receptive energy, which is the essence of *Hatha* yoga. When two people practice together, both bring a combination of masculine and feminine qualities to each pose. One partner might bring more strength while the other brings more flexibility, so when they practice together they can harmonize those two characteristics—the stronger partner helps the other gain strength while the more flexible partner helps the other stretch more.

For couples, practicing the poses together helps develop great intimacy, but without the pressure and emotional charge of sex. However, *Yoga with a Friend* is not only just for couples, but also for friends and family to practice together. It's a wonderful way to spend quality time together, strengthening and opening both physically and emotionally.

In partner poses, you can experience the wonder of non-verbal communication and shared commonalities. This is the essence of the word *namaste*, which many teachers say at the end of yoga classes. *Namaste* has been translated in so many ways, but essentially it means, “I honor the place in your soul that has the same inherent goodness and light as I find in my own soul.” So every time you hold a pose with a friend, you open a window into what you have in common—your basic humanity. In practicing these partner poses, you truly put meaning into the word *namaste*.

If you practice yoga regularly on your own, you will notice several immediate differences in practicing with a partner. Instead of practicing your favorite poses, you will probably practice some poses you do less frequently as you and your friend negotiate your pose sequence. Initially, you will speak more than in a solo practice, but through time you will learn to adjust to each pose intuitively. The more you practice with your partner the more you will create this balance non-verbally. Over time, you and your practice mate will develop great awareness of subtle adjustments to make, but without speaking. Enjoy the process and remember to have a good laugh if you stumble out of a pose.

Our goal with *Yoga with a Friend* is to help you use yoga as a tool for growth in all your relationships. With the physical poses, we hope to share some great ideas for turning traditionally solitary yoga poses into fun and challenging partner poses. We did not want to impress you with extraordinary acrobatics, but rather demonstrate some poses that people with an average level of strength and flexibility can do together.

We do not recommend that you replace your existing yoga practice with partner yoga but rather that you diversify your practice to incorporate partner poses. We provide suggestions for how to do this later in this book.

Of course, the poses are just a part of overall yoga philosophy. In this book, we briefly introduce the other seven limbs of the eight-limbed royal yoga philosophy. We explore some of the behavioral guidelines and how you can apply them to build healthy relationships.

We also included some guided visualizations that can help you not only strengthen your relationships with the people in your life, but also help you strengthen your own sense of self and build your self-esteem. Visualizations are a powerful meditative tool, and we invite you to begin exploring with our suggestions. Enjoy the journey!