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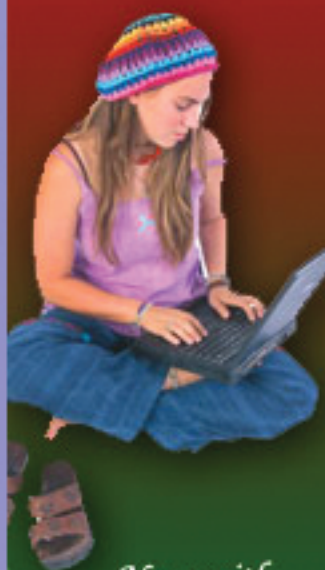
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Archives March/April 2012

Your Body..Home

By Sumya Anani

Your body is your earth. It's time to come home.

The practice of yoga developed as the yoga masters studied life all around them. They observed the movement of the sun, the trees, and animals in their natural surroundings. This is how and why *ahimsa*, nonviolence toward all life, evolved as the first *yama* (observance) of yoga. All life is sacred.

We call the earth our mother because the earth gives us life and sustains and nourishes us. Yet, it seems to me that we are waging against Mother Earth, which is the macrocosm of the violence we wage toward the feminine. Why are we raping Mother Earth and all life on it?

In order to heal Mother Earth, we have to heal the feminine nature in all of us. In many ways, we have robbed the feminine of her spirit. Both energies—masculine and feminine—are within us all. Balancing the union of these energies, Shiva and Shakti, will bring equilibrium and balance to our individual lives and to the global community.

Ladies, the biggest contribution we can make to the healing of Mother Earth is to develop and cultivate a healthy relationship with our own bodies.

Let's look at the "beauty" industry, which can add fuel to the fire of feminine self-criticism. Magazine and television ads are plastered with women who appear to be perfect after having been altered, airbrushed, and made up significantly; they have thick beautiful hair and lips and no zits or wrinkles. Too many of us have allowed others to judge and classify the female body and worse yet, now we are criticizing and viewing our own bodies with disgust. Many women are waging a mental war against every feature and crevice of their bodies: their thighs, breasts, buttocks, skin, hair, and eyes.

According to Social Issues Research Center, "Constant exposure to idealized images of female beauty on TV, [in] magazines, and [on] billboards makes exceptional good looks seem normal, and anything short of perfection seem abnormal and ugly." No wonder female insecurity is an epidemic in our culture.

When I was in my teens and throughout most of my twenties, I was shy because I was very insecure. I constantly compared myself with other women and I never stacked up. If I thought a woman was prettier or had a better body or bigger boobs, I was jealous. I emanated insecure thoughts, creating an energy around myself that was palpable to other women. I had adopted an ugly, vicious, self-destructive pattern of thinking. Such thought patterns, sadly, are rampant among young women. (Men may feel pressure too, but women feel immense pressure to be pretty, to look a certain way, to have the right body shape.)

Fortunately, I found meditation. I started noticing my jealous thoughts and began to consciously tell myself, "This is not who I want to be." Through meditation, I began to understand that thinking, like anything, is a habit. Changing our thinking is a powerful way to enable change in our lives. I committed myself to improving my own self-image.

Because women have inherited so many negative feelings about their bodies, we need a fundamental shift in our thinking. By honoring the feminine, we can begin to find the answer to healing our self-esteem. This is something we each have to do for ourselves, but we can support each other in this work. I stopped reading "beauty" magazines. I refuse to invest my money or time in something that degrades me and other women. Why are women constantly being told by the fashion industry that we should disguise ourselves with false beauty?

It's time we change our thinking about what beauty means. Let's love ourselves. The broader lesson is that what we do to ourselves, we do to Mother Earth. As we start honoring the feminine forces in ourselves, we will naturally start honoring the diversity and beauty of all life on earth.

One place to start is with *pranayama*, the yogic breathing practice that can help us direct life energy toward healing the rift between the masculine and feminine energies. Inhale and exhale, masculine and feminine.



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Yoga masters recognized breath as the connection to life. When we breathe and move in yoga, we are tapping into *dharma* , purpose, the nature of our physical reality. As we become more intimate with our own physicality (our earth), we become more intimate with our mental and spiritual dimensions. Yoga can be a journey of personal evolution. As we progress, the breath and the flow of *vinyasa* can become a prayer for those around us as well as a beautiful prayer of healing for Mother Earth.

We are intimately connected to every living, breathing being on earth. We are connected to the oceans, to the forests, to the stars, to the animals that live and breathe with us. We are ONE.

Today, I look at women and celebrate their beauty and talents as I continue to excavate my own and inspire others to do the same. I can encourage other women to embrace their beauty because I don't feel threatened by society's impossible and artificial standards. Love the earth by loving your body and by loving each other.

Happy Earth Day. Your body is your earth. It's time to come home.

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Sumya Anani is a 4x World Champion boxer, 500-hour registered yoga teacher through Yoga Alliance, and personal trainer. She leads "Path of a Spiritual Warrior" yoga retreats to Jamaica, Guatemala, and Colorado and is available for yoga workshops at yoga studios or martial arts dojos. For more information, visit sumya.com.