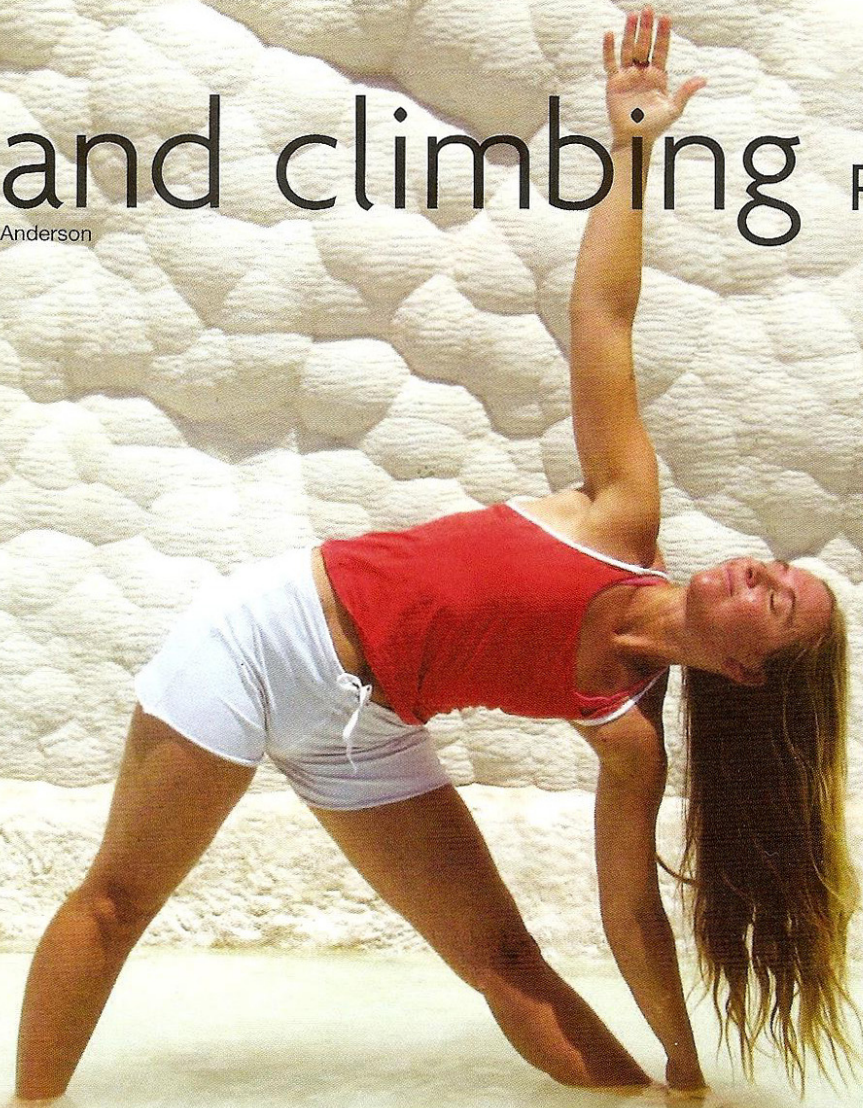


yoga and climbing Part 2

by Annie Anderson



Annie at the hot springs of Pamukkale

Pratyaha - Awareness

Steady and consistent awareness is necessary for asana practice and climbing. By being aware when climbing and practising Yoga, we can gain insights into thoughts, emotions, intentions, expectations, habits, breathing, movement and balance and the interaction of the mind and body. Zen master Unman says: "If you walk, just walk. If you sit, just sit. But whatever you do, don't wobble." Be impeccably aware all day long, not just when climbing or when practising Yoga. Awareness is gained through self-study and observation. This awareness carries through to challenging climbing situations where we must keep a balanced and objective mind.

Klesas - Obstacles

Doubt is an obstacle. If you are free from doubt when climbing or practising Yoga, you will be strong and steady. The *Yoga Sutras* tell us that: "Yoga practice is like an obstacle race; many obstructions are purposely put on the way for us to pass through. They are there to make us understand and express our own capacities. We all have that strength, but we don't seem to know it. We seem to need to be

challenged and tested in order to understand our own capacities." (21) Challenge and the obstacles make us feel alive and enable us to learn! Sri Swami Satchidananda explains: "When your mind, which has been tossed about by conflicting opinions, becomes still and centred in equilibrium, then you experience Yoga." (22) When we give our full commitment and trust, with no doubt in our mind, to a move in climbing we feel this experience of equilibrium. To climb harder routes or to practise difficult balance postures and inversions, we must let go of the worry of falling, of fear, of tension and of what is to come. We must learn to focus on the moment and trust that it will be okay.

TKV Desikachar writes, "A further meaning of the word Yoga is to attain what was previously unattainable." (23) A climber often cannot complete a route or a boulder problem the first time. A climber is often in a transition from a state of being unable to do, to being able to do. In 2006 Dave MacLeod climbed Rhapsody (E11 7a), the world's first E11 traditional route. This one route took him seventy

days of effort and two years of training. In 2001, Chris Sharma climbed the world's hardest sport climb, Realization, a 5.15a overhang in France. It took him thirty attempts before he succeeded. The effort, preparation, struggle and difficulty is what holds meaning and purpose. Swami Satchidananda writes in the *Living Gita* that, "Krishna has a clever way of doing things. Know that behind all the different reasoning, his aim is to make Arjuna face the situation, fight, and not run away. If you read the whole *Gita*, you keep coming across this hint: 'Get up and fight'. The underlying purpose is: fight your war." (24)

You may have reached a level in climbing or Yoga that you are efficient in, where your movement is smooth and your technique is perfect. But no matter how good you are there will always be a new challenge in a harder climb or another posture, in meditation or in pranayama. We are always learning, changing and evolving. Carlos Castaneda tells us: "Only as a warrior can one withstand the path of knowledge. A warrior cannot complain or regret anything. His life is an endless challenge, and challenges cannot possibly be good or bad. Challenges are simply challenges." (25)

Sadhana - Constant Practice

BKS Iyengar describes 'Sadhana' or 'Abhyasa' (constant practice) as a key to freedom. All of the ancient and important Yoga texts lay great emphasis on it. Iyengar goes on to say that, "Success will follow him who practises, not him who practises not . . . constant practice alone is the secret of success." (26)

Yehudi Menuhin tells us that, "Everything in life which is of value requires continuous effort and renewal." Georg Feurstein writes, "all that is required is a radical devotion to the practical application (*abhyasa*) of Yoga." (27)

Constant, regular and uninterrupted practice is the only way to master both Yoga and climbing.

Vipassana (Insight Meditation)

Vipassana (Insight Meditation) means seeing things as they really are. Gotama Buddha was taught this ancient art in India more than 2,500 years ago. The mind is often caught up in past experiences, following negative chatter, or imagining what might happen sometimes with anxiety or worry. When we are mindful we simply see what happens exactly the way it happens, without judgement, expectations or falling into habitual thought or emotional patterns. If we are mindful when we are climbing, we are practising in-the-moment climbing which means accepting the experiences, as they arise, for what they are. I like this quote, which relates to mindfulness: "Keep your eye fixed on the path to the top. But don't forget to look right in front of you. The last step depends upon the first." (28)

Mindfulness meditation begins with awareness of the breath. The breath anchors us to the present moment: the mind grows stronger, more stable and more alert. You experience the breath as it is, you don't try and change it or control it. If a thought, feeling, emotion, image or sound comes into your consciousness you recognise it and then let it be. You don't follow the content of it, interfere, or attempt to

understand it or hold on to it. You are the observer. It is like watching a river flow by. You keep bringing your focus back to the breath. After some practice you may find that you have thoughts or feelings that are repetitive and automatic. For example, the fear that a climber may have when leading a route often comes from an imagining what might happen.

Mindfulness allows us to observe previously unconscious, mechanical patterns of emotions or thoughts, or old habits. It strengthens our concentration and insight, helping us to develop more understanding and wisdom. Mindfulness is like a ball that has been set into motion in a bowl, once it is moving it is in the process and the present. The goal is the higher objective. It is the base of the bowl. Once you are set in motion you don't need to worry about the goal because you are already in the process of achieving it.

Concepts and Patience

Patience, practice and full attention without focusing on the outcome or fixed concepts is necessary to learning and gaining insights in climbing and Yoga. It is the love of the practice and learning that is important. Patience helps to keep a steady and settled mind, allowing us to practise with the idea of perfection and quality. If we are impatient and always striving for a result, our practice or climbing experiences becomes unsettled and we become anxious. Joseph Goldstein explains that, "There are many concepts with which we have been strongly conditioned, and which are deeply engrained in our minds." (29)

It is useful to develop insight into the nature of concepts and our relationship to them. Concepts include the grading system in climbing or the shape and form of the perfect *Adho*

Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog). Concepts can interfere, in many ways, with reality. Concepts can be a very positive part of our lives, but we should use them without being a slave to them. Don't get locked into preconceptions of 'how things are supposed to be'. Experiment, explore and investigate.

To be continued . . .

Annie has been researching the similarities in climbing and Yoga for the last 5 years. She began climbing in 1992 and instructing in 1998. You can visit her web site www.exploreclimbing.com or email her at annie@exploreclimbing.com.

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(22) Satchidananda, Sri Swami. The Living Gita. Yoga Sutra 2:53.

(23) Desikachar, T.K.V., The Heart of Yoga

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(25) Castaneda, Carlos. Tales of Power.

(26) Iyengar, B.K.S. Light on Yoga. P30.

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