

# Yes and Know: Grow your Awareness to be Well

By Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

"I want you to practice saying Yes," I told a client recently.

"You think I say no a lot?" He asked.

I told him I think his initial reaction to change, as is for a lot of us (or me), is to resist. In fact, I may not have recognized this pattern in him if I wasn't well acquainted with it myself! This fellow was intelligent and well spoken, but was suffering serious financial and emotional hardship as he turned down every job opportunity that came his way for one reason or another, which in the end all amounted to resistance.

While this work was more talk-focused and less about *Hatha* (physical) Yoga, I began to think about how we can learn from our experiences on the mat to address counter-productive patterns in our lives. I noticed it firsthand in my own practice the next day in class with my teacher. I was deeply aware during the practice, of each muscle, joint, and fiber as my teacher guided us through a series of intricate postures when suddenly EUREKA! Before I could even consciously comprehend what I was doing, I found myself in a pose that I've never been able to achieve.

After class, I realized that if the teacher had told us what he planned to do that day, I would have already made the decision that this pose is not something I'm capable of doing. But instead I stayed in the moment, I said YES to each breath and movement, and came away with new KNOWLEDGE, that I could do something I never expected.

For instance, take the pose *Prasarita Padottanasana* (don't worry about the pronunciation! Wide-Legged Forward Bend), or any new pose in Yoga or new "practice" in Life, you must first say YES, to **alert your body AND your mind** that you are about to try something new. And once you've begun, allow yourself to KNOW that you are becoming aware of more than just your hips, thighs, and back.

Try it:

## Prasarita Patottanasana (Wide-Legged Forward Bend)

- Separate feet about 3-4.5 feet apart (this will be wider than you may expect)
- Be sure that feet are facing forward and are pallel to eachother
- Engage thigh muscles by drawing them up
- Interlock your fingers behind you and draw your hands down to lift your chest and breath in

- Exhale and fold forward releasing your hands to the floor in line with your shoulders
- Place the crown of your head on the floor, a block, or a pile of blankets to support your head
- Hold the pose for 2-5 breath cycles (inhale/exhale)
- To come out, place your hands on your hips, lift your chest forward, engage your thighs, inhale and come up

**BENEFITS:** Headache, fatigue, mild depression, stretches and strengthens inner and back-thighs, relieves mild back pain, and calms the brain

\* Do not practice this pose without an experienced yoga teacher if you have low-back problems

## The Broader Concept

In Yoga, we often think of saying YES as a way to alert yourself that something new is coming down the pike. And then we think of Knowledge as the awareness that results from the experience. You just may even come away with new knowledge, about your body, about yourself, and maybe some new ideas to practice off the mat too.

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