

YOGA STYLES

Yin and Yang Yoga comes from the Taoist spiritual tradition indigenous to China. Tao refers to the mysterious source of existence and translates to the way, the path, The Absolute. In Taoism the entire universe is regarded as a living organism imbued with life force.

Being in harmony with the flow of this energy in nature is the essence of Taoist attitude. Taoism finds its origins in the shamanic cultures of people who lived along the Yellow River region of northern China thousands of years ago. From these ancient and animistic beginnings Taoism evolved into several primary branches or schools that encompass magic, divination, ceremony and folk religion, philosophy and mysticism, internal alchemy and medicine, and ethics. Within the main branches of Taoism there is a profusion of various divisions and sects, some of who conflict with each other and some of who borrow practices and principles from each other.

Taoist yoga is part of a larger system of physical and breathing exercises known as chi kung (or qigong) that is used in Chinese medicine as a prescription for restoring health and as a preventative to disease and premature aging. The Chinese language has no word for yoga. I use the term yoga because its meaning is better understood in the west, and to differentiate the flexibility training and internal alchemy from the other more standard types of chi kung, which I also include in my teachings. Through many years of my own practice, personal experience, and observations of animals in their environment I have developed new postures, variations, and types of flow. And I have expanded upon the alchemical aspects of the art. As a result I have evolved the Taoist yoga tradition I learned into my own dynamic style I call Yin and Yang yoga which is comprised of the five following facets:

Yin Yoga: Postures of stillness for promoting growth, clearing energetic blockages, and enhancing circulation.

Yang Yoga: Postures for developing core strength, muscle tone, balance, and stamina.

Taoist Flow Yoga: This is more than just a sequence of both yin and yang postures. In Taoist flow the process of transition from pose to pose is as integral to the practice as the postures themselves. Taoist movement is a continuous, smooth and circular motion that promotes ease, fluidity and grace in the body.

Taoist Alchemy: The art of transformation, cultivating the five elemental energies of Earth, Metal, Water, Wood, and Fire, enlivening and integrating these universal forces in the body and consciousness, and awakening the primal spirit that resides within each of us.

Medical Chi Kung: Exercises that involve very simple and gentle movements and breathing techniques designed to increase vitality and maintain harmony in one's energetic field and in the body's natural rhythms and functions.

Yin and Yang is the complimentary pair of opposites contained within the whole. Yin represents the soft, receptive principle and yang represents the hard, active principle. Some people are teaching a form of yoga they call Yin and Yang that consists of my Taoist Yin yoga combined with yang like Hatha yoga. Although I have studied Hatha yoga and have incorporated some of its poses into my style, the tradition of Taoist yoga is replete with its own yang postures and properties.

The Art Of YIN AND YANG YOGA

By Paulie Zink

Paulie Zink received intensive private instruction for ten years as the sole protégé of Taoist Chi Kung and Kung fu Master Cho Chat Ling from Hong Kong. As a three-time international martial arts grand champion, Paulie is renowned for his fluidity, flexibility, and artistry of motion. He is the founder of Yin yoga and has been teaching for over 30 years.

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I am delighted to see how the practice of Yin yoga has spread throughout the global yoga community. To offer Teacher Certification in Yin yoga I have founded The Yin Yoga Institute in order to provide guidelines in teaching Yin yoga and to establish a standard of excellence in the art. The Yin Yoga Institute also serves as the official Teacher Registration for Yin yoga and Yin and Yang yoga teachers who meet the minimum requirements.

I've heard people say that Yin yoga is an "easy yoga". It's true Yin yoga can be applied as a restorative therapy and taught at a very beginner stage. But when it is practiced in its full aspect it is not easy. If your intention is to grow then you will feel a tremendous amount of pull and growth while holding a posture. The art is not about just sitting there relaxed. While it may look from the outside like you aren't doing much, on the inside there is an intensity of activity in the body.

What is commonly being taught as Yin yoga is the basic first level of my art. I feel it is important for students to be aware of the deeper dimensions, philosophy, and comprehensive components that are fundamental to Yin and Yang yoga. From stillness comes motion. The yin becomes the yang and the yang becomes the yin. They are the ebb and flow, the pulsation of the universe. It's like breathing, there is inhaling and exhaling. They are inseparable. The purpose of my Yin yoga is to grow flexible, to develop energy flow, and to restore our innate ability so we can move our bodies the way we are meant to move with the agile vitality of a monkey, because we are monkeys!

We are human primates and as such we possess the extraordinary capacity to intentionally merge our consciousness with our natural world. And that is really what Taoist alchemy is all about. It's about becoming one with the spirit of various creatures and embodying their instinctual qualities in our energetic field. In this way we can cultivate the springiness of a frog, the lightness of a bird, the patience of a tortoise. Alchemy is also about learning to feel in our bodies and our emotions the distinct qualities of each of the five elements that move within us and flow all around us in a constant state of transformation from one to the next. When I do yoga I want to be like water pouring from a glass. Our bodies are mostly water. Our natural state is to move fluidly like water and adapt to our environment.

There are no rigid theories or rules in Taoist yoga. There is not just one right way to do any given posture. Each of us has a unique body and disposition. I encourage students to modify the art to fit themselves. When students learn to open to their intuitive hearts then they begin to discover the individual expression of the artist within, of their own personal Tao. The mind is very powerful. And the practice of yoga is ninety percent mind. It is necessary to have a receptive, spontaneous and playful state of mind to enter deeply into the art. I never tell students that they are limited. If a student believes she is limited and does yoga with the intention of being restricted, then she will be. I prefer to be supportive to help students realize their full potential. As long as we are alive our bodies are growing, healing, and regenerating. Except for extreme cases, I believe there is almost always the possibility of moving beyond our current condition. The Taoist masters didn't talk about limitations. They talked about infinite possibilities.

SITTING CRAB

Element: Earth
Benefits: Lower back, shoulders, hips, and thighs flexibility.
How to:

- Sit with legs extended in front of you with your feet a little wider than shoulder width apart. Place palms on the ground in front of you and between your legs for balance.
- Bend the knees and bring both legs back towards the shoulders.
- Slide arms under each leg until each elbow is under each knee.
- Lower the torso until the elbows touch the ground.



HEAVEN AND EARTH,
BEGINNER'S POSITION

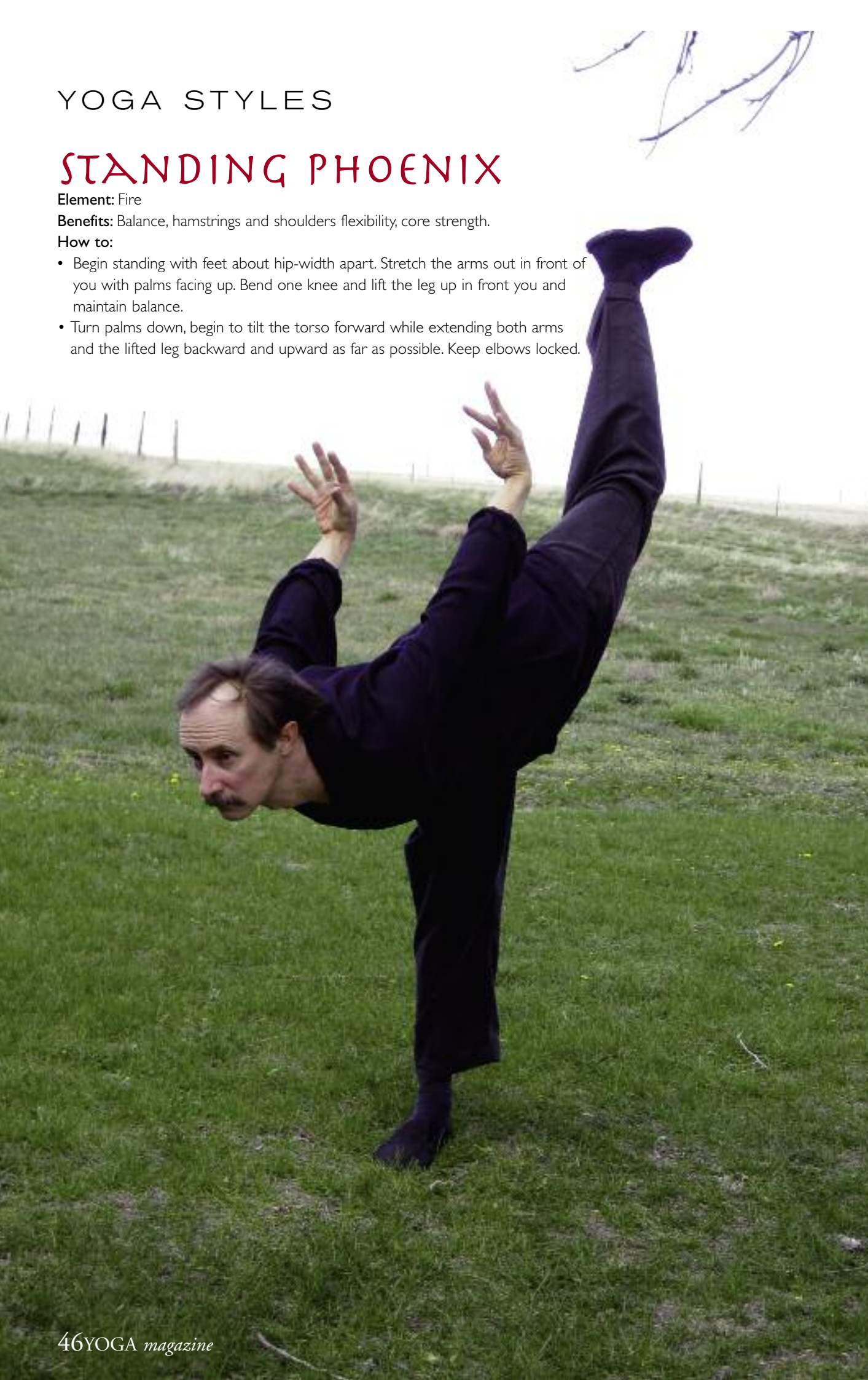
Element: Earth
Benefits: Ankles, knees, thighs, and hips flexibility.
How to:

- Begin sitting with knees together and both legs extended in front of you.
- Bend the knee on one leg and slide the foot back towards the hip. The sole of the foot should be facing upward.
- Bend the knee of the opposite leg and bring the ankle up to rest on opposite thigh.
- Slide the ankle as close to the opposite hip as possible. Face the sole of the foot upward.

STANDING PHOENIX

Element: Fire
Benefits: Balance, hamstrings and shoulders flexibility, core strength.
How to:

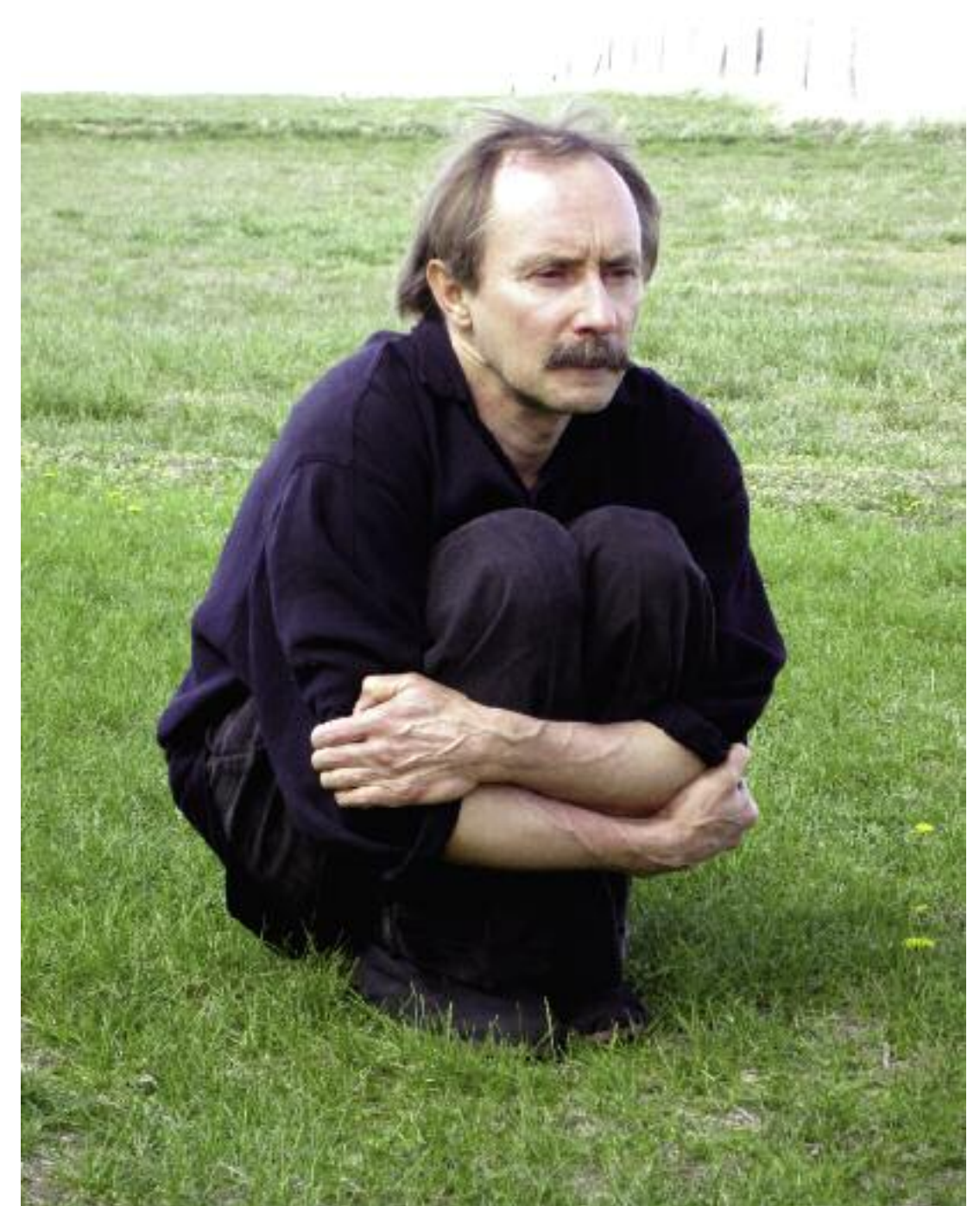
- Begin standing with feet about hip-width apart. Stretch the arms out in front of you with palms facing up. Bend one knee and lift the leg up in front you and maintain balance.
- Turn palms down, begin to tilt the torso forward while extending both arms and the lifted leg backward and upward as far as possible. Keep elbows locked.



PHOENIX LANDING

Element: Fire
Benefits: Shoulder strength, hamstrings and calves flexibility.
How to:

- Begin from the Standing Phoenix position. Slowly exhale as you bring the hands to the ground and place them palms down about six inches in front of the foot.
- Lock the knee of the leg you are standing on and lift the opposite leg upward as far as possible.
- Look straight down to the ground and lean the head towards the ground as far as possible.



PHOENIX

Element: Fire

Benefits: Balance, leg strength, knee flexibility.

How to:

- Begin from stump posture. Stretch the arms out to your sides with hands about head height, palms facing upwards.
- Extend one leg forward straight in front of you keeping it off the ground while maintaining balance. This can be done while balancing on the ball of the foot. In the more advanced level the foot is flat on the ground.
- Bend the knee of the extended leg and bring the ankle to rest on top of opposite thigh.

ADVANCED PHOENIX

Element: Fire

Benefits: Same as Phoenix plus more ankle and shoulder flexibility.

How to:

- Begin from the Phoenix posture with palms facing upward. The standing foot should be flat on the ground.
- Roll the palms forward and rotate the arms 360 degrees until palms and elbows are facing upward. Lean the torso forward as far as possible.

STUMP

Element: Wood

Benefits: Thigh strength, ankles, knees and calves flexibility.

How to:

- Begin standing with feet together.
- Squat down as low as possible. Wrap the arms around the shins grab the opposite elbows. Lean as far forward as possible.

DON'T MISS PART 2 OF PAULIE'S WORKOUT NEXT MONTH!