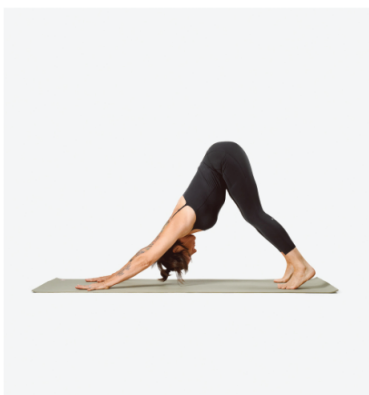


# THE SONG IN OUR BONES

EMBODIMENT AND THE MIND-BODY PRACTICES OF KATONAH YOGA®

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KATONAH YOGA®

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## INTRODUCTION: THE SONG IN OUR BONES

The body disappears as the center of experience at the very moment that it functions best. Drew Leder

I have heard the experience of losing a loved one described as the sudden *presence of their absence*. That phrase really resonated with me. Where their body, mind, and breath once were, in one's lived space, there is now a palpable, visceral, and felt sense of emptiness. And over time, it is this presence of their absence that slowly fades.

In his book, *The Absent Body*, philosopher and physician Drew Leder draws on a similar phenomenon to describe how we become estranged from our own bodies. Just as we acclimate to the absence of someone we've lost, Leder argues that in everyday life, we often acclimate to the absence of the body itself. The body, including the mind and breath, while foundational to all experience, frequently recedes from awareness, especially when it functions smoothly. It becomes absent even as it structures our world.

While this absence can be understood as beneficial, freeing us to experience ourselves at the center of a sphere of concentrated radiance, able to focus on the world and function well, it comes with a risk. When the body is absent from our awareness for too long, we may not give it the care and attention it needs. As Leder suggests, the body tends to ap

## CHAPTER ONE: BREATH TAKING, LIFE MAKING

The lungs are a mysterious and even mystical organ. They are our connection to the atmosphere, the organ that extracts the life force we need to exist.

Michael J Stephen

When something has always been there, without requiring anything of us, for as long as we can remember, we might take it as a given. We might imagine it to be self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and always doing what it was meant to do. And so, it drifts from our awareness, returning only when something is wrong.

Our breath can be like this. Too often, its central role and potential in our experience, health, and longevity are thought to be outside of our control. We normalize indifference to its importance and neglect its potential. And yet, it is said that life itself can be measured in breaths—beginning with an inhale and ending with an exhale.

The yogis remind us that each of us is given a finite number, a measure of our time here. The tacit answer to living longer, therefore, is to develop the breath and slow it down. Or more importantly perhaps, to notice that what remains within our control is not only to honor the quantity of those breaths, but to improve their quality.

But breathing is not a skill most of us were ever taught. Unlike riding a bike or learning to read, skills that demand effort, attention, and repetition, breath arrives unbidden. It happens on its own. And although some may already be aware that there is much to learn about breathing, many of us need to understand that it can be trained, refined, and made intentional. This is the fascinating thing about the breath: it can be trained.



## CHAPTER TWO: PRACTICES

### Embodiment Practice

Across cultures and eras, people have wrestled with the same dilemma: how to have a mind without losing it. How to be in a body and find joy, avoid bitterness, and feel good.

They have asked: Why does my body feel separate from my mind? Where do my thoughts end and my body begin?

Many have tried to master the mind with thought alone. But I lean toward another view: you cannot take the fortress by charging its front gate. Because the mind resists direct assault, meeting every advance with more thought. We need another way. As I've explored here, that way is through the body, for the body already holds the mind and the spirit. And, in my view, a method that explores the mind, body, and breath is one that examines our embodiment.

I define embodiment as the ongoing process of being that resides in and manifests from one's biology, psychology, and environment, not as observed from the outside but as experienced from within. As I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5, along with the body we are born with, much of our embodiment is shaped by processes, experiences, and circumstances that we are largely unconscious of. An embodiment practice, therefore, is the intentional reforming, partial recuperating, and perhaps even re



awakening of parts that over time have gone offline, out of balance, or developed as a compensatory pattern no longer needed. In other words, it is bringing that which is unconscious, in our minds and our bodies, to light.

The Katonah Yoga® practices are embodiment practices. They center the body as the container for the elixir of our spirit. And it is a work in progress. I always think of the La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, which has been being built for over one hundred years. The building continues, and the sections that need repair are being repaired simultaneously. It is a perfect example of how we are building and rebuilding our own cathedrals to house our spirit, and that it is an ongoing process without end until our last breath.

### Why We Measure

An embodiment practice is about becoming conscious of what was previously unconscious, thereby giving you the capacity to decide how you want to be in the world. What's interesting is that though working in our corporal infrastructure requires effort, it is less personal than you might think. This is because the body is less corrupted and more easily

organized than the mind. A muscle has no will of its own. Fascia is only shaped through patterns and repetition. Joints will move back into position when given good information. I used to say that my thighs don't think they are too big. Our body does not evaluate itself. Therefore, for something to be so primary to our experiencing life (our body), it is much easier to adjust, amend, and alter than our mind.

Our body also doesn't have attachments and aversions, preferences, and feelings the way our mind does. Even though feelings feel very bodily, our feelings about something or a situation can change very quickly when we get new information. Lao Tzu said that the man who sees only five colors is blind, and the one who hears only five notes is deaf. Meaning our feelings, whether you mean sensations or emotions, are good to have, to explore, and to reflect on. But don't use them without some other way to gauge or measure where to go or what to do next.



So, when reforming, recuperating, and reawakening parts of our embodiment and correcting mind-body patterns, especially as we age, instead of referring so much to our personal narratives, in Katonah Yoga, measure is used.

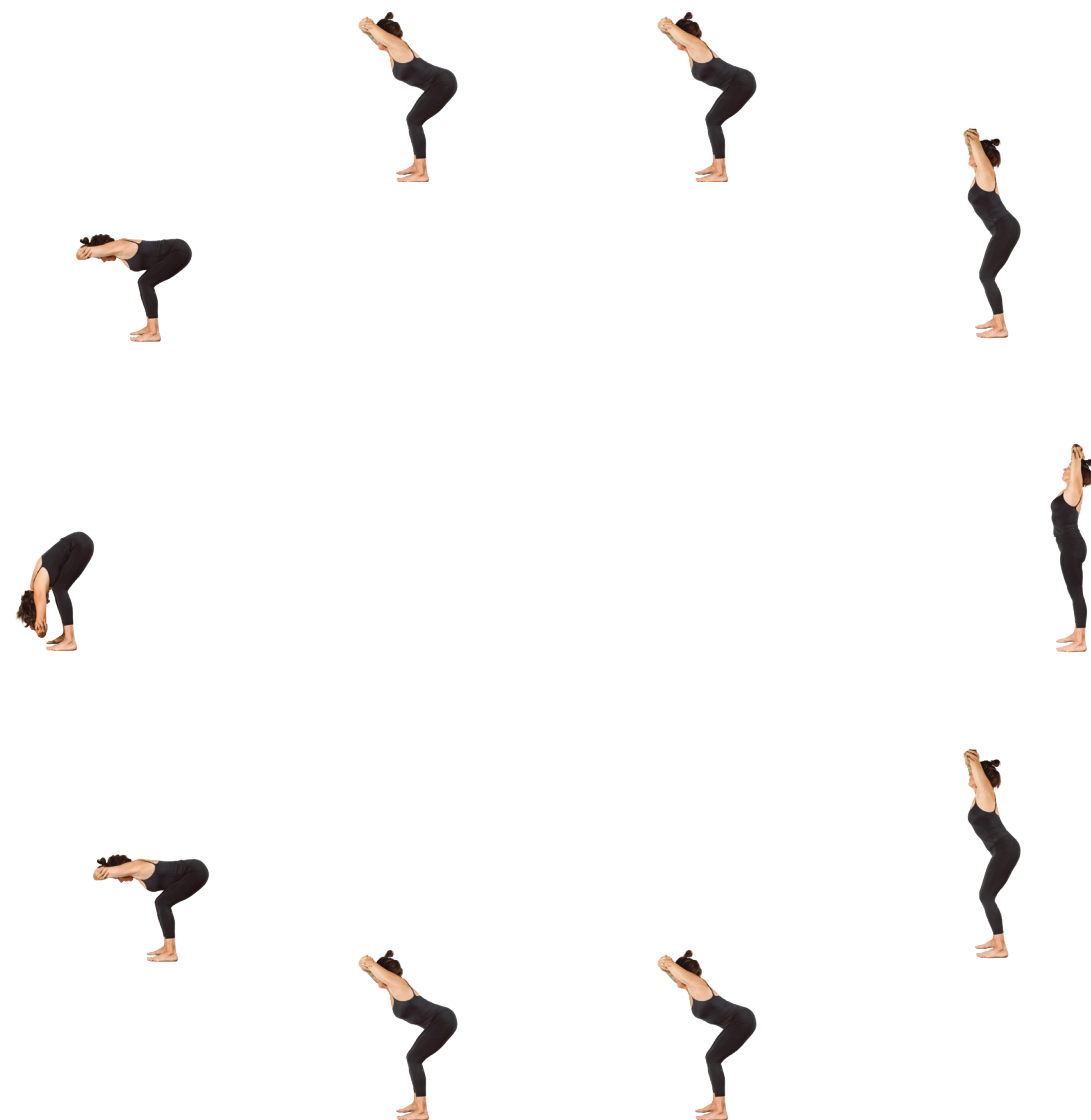
### **The Geometry of Embodiment**

Geometry gives us a way to measure and reorganize our body. Circles, triangles, and squares are archetypes that help us find structure and direction in our own embodiment. When we work with geometric measure, we reawaken the body's memory of coherence and function. These universal energetic principles remind our tissues, joints, and breath how to move in right relationship with gravity, with space, and with nature.

Imagine being in the center of a joint. Through the subtle navigation of proprioception—our internal compass—the body begins to organize around that center. When we inhabit the center of joint space, gravity becomes a nutrient for our bones rather than a source of wear and tear. Otherwise, a single degree of misalignment, magnified through repetition, can accumulate over time. Small deviations in structure can become amplified through compensation, resulting in patterns of tension and long-term imbalance.

The body experiences misalignment exponentially: the longer a pattern persists, the longer it takes to recover or correct. To measure is to make formal; to make formal is to refine. Through practice and precision, we become formidable.

Using measure helps us find the center of a joint, and the body only articulates upward from that center. This is how we build our bones. When the skeleton is well-stacked and supported, gravity participates in osteogenesis—the natural process of bone growth. Just as weight-bear



Hangs take us into the first floor of the body, into the basement where experiences and ideas compost. We go deep not to stay there, but to learn how to rise again—to meet the moment and reach for the stars.

### Integrating the Floors of Your House: Dogs

Each time another element, or another fold is added, we work with more complexity. In the case of downward dog, the shoulders come into play. Dogs build upon the foundational actions established in the hangs. Like the hangs, downward dog requires the same coordination it takes to walk or run, making it both therapeutic and integrative. But with added complexity comes increased challenge, and more room for error.

To access the therapeutic benefits of down dog, it's good to be clear about what version of the pose you're doing and why. Students come with different movement histories and cues from various yoga traditions. Some approaches are sharp and acute; others are more extended or passive. Without clarity of intent, the any pose or movement can become confusing rather than coherent.

Using the principles of measure and geometry, the Katonah down dog begins with the reference of a 60-degree triangle, which is the archetype of strength, structure, and stability. In this version of dog, the angles between the arms and floor, the legs and floor, and the hinge at the pelvis form a balanced triangle. Because of the learned flip of the pelvis from hanging work, the back becomes broad, supportive, and directional. I often describe the spine in this shape as cascading like a waterfall down the back.

Students often think this pose is about straightening the legs. However, it is the upward flip of the pelvis that unbends the knees, not muscular effort, but structural orientation. The balls of the feet act as reference points, helping you navigate the moment and the movement of the pelvis from the ground. The heels, reaching back and away from the sit bones, create a kind of hemisphere—broadening and grounding the lower body's base.

**The Song In Our Bones** is a re-enchantment of the body. It is a braiding together of somatic science, philosophy, and lived experience. It explores how our bones, breath, and movements carry memory and meaning.

Drawing from yoga, Taoist alchemy, evolutionary biology, phenomenology, and personal experience, the book reveals how the body is not just a vessel but a living archive—an intelligence shaped by tension and release, injury and recovery, silence and song.

With poetic precision and the grounded practices of Katonah Yoga®, this work invites readers to reorient themselves: to see the body as a house, a map, a story unfolding in rhythm with nature. A manual of equal parts theory and practice, **The Song in Our Bones** shows that embodiment is not only personal recuperation but also resistance to the cultural forces that estrange us from ourselves and from one another.

This is a guide for seekers, movers, teachers, and thinkers who sense that the body holds more than posture or performance. It offers a way back to coherence, to the hidden patterns that make us who we are, to the song that has always been there, deep in our bones.

## **THE SONG IN OUR BONES**

Joy Yoga Project