



# MINDFUL M O V E M E N T

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**A**s the editor of a luxury spa magazine I am perpetually bombarded with dazzling pictures of dreamworthy resorts set in beautiful scenic landscapes. My inbox is brimming with the latest and greatest ‘fantasy escapes’ and I’ll admit to the existence of a folder called ‘future,’ in which my own personal wish-list of ‘must get there one day’ locations are filed. One such destination has long been Bali’s COMO Shambhala Estate – a gorgeous health retreat set among the steep ravines and lush rice paddies of Ubud’s central foothills.

My arrival in Bali does not play out as I envisioned. The fantasy version saw me sweeping into COMO donned in a crisp white tunic and oversized sunglasses with sunscreen in hand. Instead, my immune system does a sharp nosedive *en route* to Indonesia and by the time I get off the plane I am a feverish, snotty mess. I exit the airport only to discover it is pelting rain outside (ahh yes I did hear tropical climates have a wet season), and wrapped in a woolly cardigan, huddle into a car. An hour later I crawl into COMO’s reception with a box of Kleenex and bloodshot eyes and am promptly sent to my (stunning!) villa, where I curl up on the bed and go straight to sleep.

## DAY ONE

I wake the next morning only to discover my flu symptoms have worsened. My joints ache, my limbs feel heavy and I have a throbbing headache. Not an ideal condition to be in when you're about to undertake a five-day yoga retreat. Luckily I'm in capable healing hands and head straight to the spa for a 'Taksu' massage. The therapist responds to my strong-pressure request and kneads away at my knotted muscles with well-trained skill. She comes across a lump of gristle in my neck that shoots pain directly into my eyebrow and pinpoints this nasty knot as the cause of my headache. I head back to my room, take an epsom salt bath, jump on the couch and doze in and out of sleep for the rest of the day.

## DAY TWO

I wake feeling lethargic and achy but drag myself to the morning yoga class anyway. I'm here to "explore the deeper openings of the moving body, beyond the muscular-skeletal," under the guidance of Australian teacher, Judy Krupp. Dubbed 'The Art and Science of your Yoga Practice,' this therapeutic retreat has been designed to help habit-prone bodies increase strength and flexibility via *asana* (posture) practice and the mechanics of movement. Although this may sound a little abstract, Judy's approach is anything but. Direct and forthright, her manner and teaching style is refreshingly down-to-earth and practical. As someone who has been teaching yoga for more than 30 years (not to mention years of work as a myotherapy practitioner), she is a true movement veteran and her knowledge of the body – its potential, idiosyncrasies and limitations – is epic.

There are 20 people in the class, 19 of which are women, most of whom are yoga teachers who have followed Judy from Australia and have been practising for more than 10 years. Considering I've only been practising yoga for about four years and am unfamiliar with Judy's practice, I feel somewhat intimidated by what lies ahead. She leads us into meditation and following her instruction I imagine a bundle of helium balloons attached to my ears as I attempt to sit still and upright. Judy talks to us about the importance of proper breathing as we move into an extended *vinyasa* (breath-synchronised movement) sequence



THIS PAGE: *The yoga pavilion at COMO Shambhala Estate, Bali, Indonesia and yoga instructor, Judy Krupp in half split asana.* OPPOSITE PAGE: *The Tirta Ening pool at COMO Shambhala Estate.* OPENING PAGE: *Girls doing yoga at COMO Shambhala Estate.*

and although I'm enjoying the teachings, feel weak and feverish. I push through my discomfort and by the end of the nearly three-hour class start to feel slightly human (albeit physically exhausted).

My exercise high is short-lived and soon after class the muscles in my neck freeze, followed by a pounding headache. It feels as though a giant creature is crushing my skull in its nasty claws and I head back to the spa where Shiatsu and acupuncture specialist Hashimoto greets me with a smile and a handful of needles. Hashimoto navigates the knots in my shoulders, likening the muscles in my neck to "taut wire" and proceeds to place needles strategically down my neck and back, followed by some gentle stretching.

By the time he has finished, the pain has started to ease, yet when I mention the afternoon's upcoming yoga class Hashimoto laughs and tells me to go lie down instead. I follow his orders and spend the afternoon horizontal with a heat pack under my neck. A variety of herbal teas, medicinal elixirs and comforting broths are sent to my room

throughout the evening and as I lie reclined sipping on a cup of delicious ginger tea, start to wonder if being sick is all that bad.

## DAY THREE

I feel much stronger upon waking and walk to morning class with a bounce in my step. The theme of the day is 'bones and strength' and before we begin *asana* practice, Judy discusses the principles of basic alignment and the concept of 'stacking bones.' As she explains, the body has certain natural 'lines of force' and it's important to work with those lines on the yoga mat through what she describes as "functional anatomy" in the poses. Translation: we can use gravity to help our yoga practice. Further, that our bones are strong and if stacked correctly, can be used to take the pressure off our muscles. Ultimately this not only leads to correct alignment, but also means the yogi can hold poses for much longer without the risk of injury.

We begin to flow but shortly into the class Judy asks us to gather because she's already spotted misaligned bodies around the room.

As it turns out, I am one such example. Judy asks me to lie face-down on the floor where she promptly lines up my feet and notes that one of my legs is longer than the other (quite common apparently). She then lifts my feet one at a time, asking me to bend at the knee to a 90 degree angle and when she asks the group if they can see a problem "oohs" and "ahhs" of confirmation echo around the room. Clearly this is bad news.

I ask what the issue is and am told that my pelvis is significantly twisted (to the right). As Judy explains, this twist is causing an external rotation on my left leg which is responsible for an imbalance in the quad muscles, resulting in tightness through the piriformis (glute muscle) of my left leg and tightness through my inner-right hamstring. The ultimate result of all of these imbalances, she diagnoses, is a pinched sciatic nerve. She's right of course; my left hamstring has been in ongoing pain since last year.

To make matters worse, Judy points to my shoulders and explains that my body has been trying to overcompensate for my twisted



pelvis by adopting a “double twist.” In other words, because my pelvis is lopsided, so are my shoulder blades. Judy then flips me over and props my lower back on a block with my left leg bent underneath me. At this point it becomes painfully obvious that my left hip is jutting up at a different angle to my right one.

What’s more, I’m told I have a severe anterior tilt (my pelvis points down) that is putting my psoas (the muscle that connects the spine to the legs), under pressure. Sure enough when she sticks her thumbs into my lower belly I’m overcome with intense pain that has me gritting my teeth in pure agony. I crawl off the mat and limp back to my mat wondering how on earth I acquired all these deformities and spend the rest of the class on pelvic high-alert.

The afternoon practice brings all my imbalances to light and I feel like a complete novice as Judy manipulates my body into correct alignment in the most simple postures. She tears my warrior pose to shreds followed by the shape of my *parsvakonasana* (side angle) and *trikonasana* (triangle). The problem, I’m told, is that I am hyper-extending, or as Judy proclaims, “having a holiday in your joints!” I tentatively transition into *ardha chandrasana* (half moon pose), only to be told that I’m “hanging off my hamstring,” which is putting strain on my already tender sciatic nerve.

These are not difficult poses and I’m surprised and disheartened (not to mention humbled) to discover I’ve unknowingly been practising with such bad habits. The good news is that I now know where my weaknesses lie (my core and hamstrings), I can go about strengthening them. I experiment with new angles for the rest of the practice and discover a new sense of stability thanks to Judy’s adjustments.

#### DAY FOUR

The alignment work from the day before is playing on my mind as I prepare for class and I wander into the yoga pavilion on day four feeling emotional and contemplative. Ironically, Judy is in a playful mood and although she encourages us to practise with a “strong sense of awareness,” she also reminds us to remain lighthearted in our efforts. As Judy points out, “Let the practice serve your life and don’t turn it into another

stress. Life is already stressful enough!”

The theme of the day is organs and Judy encourages us to embrace an “organic cellular practice” as we bend and stretch our way through a sequence of cleansing spinal twists, backbends and inversions. The goal, Judy explains, is to massage the organs via the poses and “create intercellular space” using mindful intention; the result of which is a deeper internal practice. She instructs us to imagine fresh blood washing away stored toxins from our organs, glands and cells and as I move from lungs, to liver, to kidneys and beyond, I imagine my body as a giant sponge being squeezed clean of impurities.

Between classes I explore the Estate’s gorgeous grounds and spend my afternoon swimming in the waterfall-fed pools that overlook the lush gorge beyond. Although I am ‘on retreat,’ my brain feels overloaded with new information and I take this carefree moment to empty my mind of thoughts.

The group is sore and tired when we return for afternoon practice and Judy leads us into a gentle restorative session. Implementing bolsters and straps as props, we groan our way through a series of deep ‘yin’ poses to loosen the hips and legs as Judy touches on themes of patience, peace and letting go. Using phrases

like “exquisite pain” and “delicious release,” she addresses the concept of surrender and rouses us to embrace the intensity of the stretches. “You can’t know bliss unless you know its opposite!” is her retort when someone asks how much longer we have to hold a particular pose. Although challenging, the slow, deep pace results in gooey, elastic muscles and my whole body feels like putty when I peel myself off the floor at the end of class.

#### DAY FIVE

I start my day with an early morning dip in the pool and head to practice feeling fresh and clear-headed. Although tender, my muscles feel supple and ready for movement and I’m happy to hear we’re going to spend the morning exploring the concept of fluidity. As Judy explains, more than 70 percent of the body is made up of fluid, a fact that has a profound effect on the way (how and why) we move. “You are an expression of your fluid,” she yells over some funky African beats that have me instantly inspired and shaking my booty.

Likening personality traits to habitual movement patterns, Judy flips the music from African to classical as she compares the erratic, thumping beat of arterial blood

(oxygenated blood in the lungs), to the steady, rhythmic flow of venous blood (deoxygenated blood in the organs). As she points out, those that find it easier to move to the African beats are typically those with more direct personalities, whereas those who naturally flow better to the classical music tend to be more ‘airy fairy’ types – being a typical Libran, I’m split between the two. We spend the rest of the class dancing our way through the rest of the circulatory system, exploring the patterns of the lymph and synovial fluids as we go.

During the break I head to an appointment with COMO’s resident nutritionist, Lacey Hall. After filling in a detailed lifestyle questionnaire we have a lengthy chat about my good and bad habits and Lacey swiftly pinpoints stress, a weak immune system and my body’s out-of-whack sleep biorhythm as the main culprits for some of my current health woes. To remedy this she advises me to incorporate nutrients that support the adrenal glands, cut down on stimulants such as coffee (eek!), and balance my blood sugar by snacking more. She backs this up with a print out of adrenal-boosting food and supplement suggestions and sends me on my way.

The afternoon session is devoted to exploration of what Judy terms ‘developmental progression’ – fundamental body movement patterns adopted since birth. Starting from the ground up, we are instructed to lie on our stomachs and “express ourselves from the inside out,” starting with the head and tail connection. This entails squirming around on the floor like newborn worms, an ex-

ercise that evolves into crawling, squatting and eventually walking as we explore our “rebound of force” within the core, and spine. Although seemingly basic, it becomes abundantly clear to all of us that some movement patterns come easier than others and Judy encourages us to identify our dominant patterns and work on our weaker sequences.

#### DAY SIX

On our last morning we continue to explore movement patterns, this time focusing on connectivity between the limbs. Judy gets us lying on our backs and asks us to adopt an asymmetrical ‘homo-lateral’ pattern (same arm, same leg) followed by a diagonal ‘contra-lateral’ one (opposite arm, opposite leg). From my view on the floor we look like a bunch of demented human crabs, however Judy assures us that this exercise is inherently linked to our balancing postures.

As she points out, contra-lateral movements cross the midline of the body and trigger the brain to transmit from the left to right hemisphere and vice versa; therefore, those who find the contra-lateral pattern challenging will find balancing harder because they are not ‘laterally integrated.’

My body gravitates towards the contra-lateral movements, which means in theory my balancing postures should be strong. We move into a series of balancing poses and I’m dismayed when I find it difficult to stabilise my centre of gravity in a number of postures, however as Judy points out, my twisted pelvis isn’t helping things. Note to self: build stronger core muscles!

After five days of intense yoga my body is feeling tired and tender and I head to the spa during the break for a deep tissue massage. Experience has taught me that there’s a vast difference between a ‘therapist’ and a ‘healer’; my masseuse Okra, falls into the latter category. Not only does he expertly knead away at my knotted trouble spots, but his huge healing hands emit a magic current that sends me straight into a state of zen.

In our final *asana* class Judy weaves the week’s body awareness teachings together and as we flow through a gentle *vinyasa* sequence she urges us to simultaneously tap into our breath, bones, organs, fluids and movement patterns. This is no easy task and I frown my way through the sequence as I try to multitask my concentration (so much for playfulness!). “There is a big difference between movement and grace,” muses Judy poetically as we glide from pose to pose. “Always strive for grace in your practice!” By this point my limbs are trembling in exhaustion and I feel incapable of remaining upright for much longer, let alone being graceful.

The session draws to a close and I feel a sense of peace spread through me as we move into a healing circle and sit in silent meditation. The week has brought to light an almost overwhelming new awareness of how I move my body and shifted my yoga practice in countless ways. I feel humbled and nurtured by the experience and it is with heartfelt gratitude that I say my final namaste.

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THIS PAGE: *Sitting in waterfall at COMO Shambhala Estate.*  
OPPOSITE PAGE: *Food in wok; a consultation; and reflection chair, at COMO Shambhala Estate.*