

# Éric Baret: Yoga Practice

[Interlocutor]: How do you maintain the soles of the feet?

[Éric Baret]: When there is a collapse, the plantar arch will glide... from the toes toward the heel, in a flat piece like a duck's foot. Thus you will have a very wide support, and this wide support paradoxically reduces the intensity of the pressure. At the moment you widen a contact, it loses its fixity and becomes less dense.

And then, while you let the ground be penetrated by the heat of the feet, the pelvis will glide toward the earth. It is as if you were vacuuming the telluric energy through the feet, as if they were funnels. At a given moment, you are going to simultaneously feel that rise and that fall of energy. And there you find yourself as if you were standing on cotton or clouds. That is the correct position.

If the foot presses, there is an immediate reaction in the hip. The objective of the yoga pose is to have only the free axis: spine-pelvis. Everything else is anecdotal. For the spine to be free, the pelvis has to be free. The less solid "contact" the pelvis feels, the less defensive reaction there will be in the body.

That's why we don't do like in some schools where the weight and distribution are managed millimetrically. In martial arts this can be justified: sometimes the contact of the heel is needed to transmit power when striking. But even in advanced arts this is questioned, because in a flying kick you have no contact with the ground and you strike all the same with the power of the hip.

In yoga we start only from the axis pelvis-spine. It is like a motor, a dynamo that you feel here, which goes down through the legs, goes up through the torso and expands in the arms. The pose happens here, in the center. To respect this immensity, the feet have to be "empty." If the feet "grab" the ground, if you feel the hardness, you block the circulation of energy.

We must be without contact, whether we are on the head, on the hands, on our back or on our side. We constantly explore the elimination of the idea of "contact." It is a great psychological development when you manage to work without that reference of security which is the ground. Contact is memory, it is a search for security. When you manage to work "at empty," the mind becomes available. It no longer refers to the past; it is truly present. That's why non-contact with the ground is essential: so that there is no false psychological rooting.

The spine is naturally spacious. It only becomes rigid due to defensive contraction. For us, trying to "stretch" a contraction is a serious physical error. A contraction is a movement of expansion that was blocked; if you leave it free, it resolves itself and space is recreated on its own.

If I lift my arms, I deposit them in space. The shoulders melt. There is no arm, there is no back, there is no shoulder. Everything is receptivity. But if you make a voluntary movement and tense the muscles, you block the flow. The pose is real only when the shoulders are empty. We do not seek to lengthen ligaments for an aesthetic or gymnastic issue. Stretched ligaments are useless for yoga; the only thing that matters is the freedom of the axis.

You have to feel this vibratory functioning. We almost never talk about this in seminars. Why? Because if I mention it, your mind is going to create an image of "energy" and you are going to try to imagine it. We want you to feel it without preconceptions. The day you truly feel it, it will be because we did not condition you to expect anything.

It is always the spine that frees itself from the pelvis. If you are in an inverted pose, it is the pelvis that frees itself from the spine. If you want to catch your foot in a flexion, think twice. Even if you relax the shoulders, if you "pull" on the foot, you demobilize the central region, you turn it into a dead zone. The pose has to vibrate in the axis. That's why it's not necessary to grab the feet. If the hand arrives naturally, support it, but don't pull.

Pulling with the arms to go further is just arrogance. In Kashmiri yoga, the back is totally passive for years. Only much later, when technical passivity is integrated, does the back become active, but it is an elastic activity, not a muscular tension. In that state there is no longer "front" or "back," you feel the skin in all directions.

But pedagogically, we start by working the front. Why? Because the musculature is in the back and it is easier to "forget" if we focus on the front space. It's the same as with breathing: for a long time we work focused on the front in a pedagogical way. Any extension of the torso is done with the arms surrendered, deposited. We never use the arms as levers. The arm only prolongs the line. It is secondary.

In yoga one must always question what the external limbs do. The heart is the axis pelvis-spine. When you understand this, you realize that there are not hundreds of poses, but variants of the same principle. You can apply the same thing standing, face down, on your side or on your head. They are just changes of angle to work on different zones of the spine.

Mechanical stretching, as long as the body resists, is useless. If the back is really empty, the movement becomes global and flows without pride. Feeling that you pull on one side while the lumbar zone resists on the other... that is pure struggle against oneself.

Our technique seeks to discover that cord of energy. We don't seek to "achieve" the pose; we seek to feel what is preventing the axis from being free. I am interested in knowing what blocks my shoulder, not "achieving" lowering the shoulder. I feel the tension, I don't try to relax. The word "relaxation" is usually a trap, an escape. We don't relax; we listen to the tension until it exhausts itself.

Return very consciously from the stretch. You will notice that, upon returning, at a given moment, the shoulder lets go. It is a process of cerebral cleaning. If you relax the shoulder "at will," the pattern of tension is still there in your memory and it will return. Only the total awareness of the tension allows the brain to clean that engram.

Sometimes, if you are attentive enough, the tension doesn't even get to form. For years, this is the only real work: to inhabit the body so that tension doesn't fix itself in the memory.

[Interlocutor]: Should the arm be "dead" when depositing it?

[Éric Baret]: It is about living the deposit. The arm is deposited, but it is inhabited. It is not an inert pressure. It is a state where, if the ground were to disappear, the arm would continue descending freely. Only when the pose is "inhabited" does the energy truly circulate.

[Interlocutor]: And if the contraction appears after a while?

[Éric Baret]: In that moment you have to return. Don't force the stay if the body has started to defend itself. Over time, that threshold of resistance moves away naturally. You don't have to force; you have to accept the capacity of the moment. If you let the tension increase and you stay there holding on, that is what is recorded in your brain. It is better to return, empty the body, and perhaps try the pose a second time later in the session.

What is crucial is that there is no "psychological construction" of the tension. You can have a tense shoulder and feel it, but you, as a subject, are not tense. "I feel tense" is an egoic identification. "I feel a tension in the back" is a sensory fact. When you achieve that distance, you can explore the vibration of the tension without it affecting you. But if "you feel tense," stop, because you are feeding your ego.

[Interlocutor]: Jean Klein used to say that just by observing, the tension vanishes...

[Éric Baret]: Of course, but that is for when the instrument is already very fine-tuned. At the beginning, one often has to return physically so that the system learns to let go without violence. The body does not understand confrontation. It is like fear: you work with successive approximations, with "back and forth," until one day you can stay in front of the object of fear and feel how the contraction transmutes on its own. But don't try to be a hero from the first day.

Even in the seated position, when you feel densities in the back, you can play with letting yourself fall slightly. Don't leave the back tense. You have to innovate. It's up to you to find the movement where you feel best. Everyone must invent a yoga that corresponds to them physiologically. Only you can know what corresponds to you through listening. No knowledge is required, only listening. There are no categorical imperatives about how long to stay.

For there to be a physiologically correct movement, the abdominal wall has to be supported. At the beginning they are told that at the end of the expiration they should pull in the belly, but to release it when inhaling. It's madness! But it's pedagogical. Many people have the belly as a psychologically problematic zone. We suggest for a few years pulling in the belly when expiring and letting it out when inhaling.

But if you make a movement letting go of the belly, the lumbar zone is left exposed. If you lift a suitcase letting go of the belly, you are going to enrich the osteopath. When we lift a suitcase, we support the belly. In martial arts for kids of 8 or 10 years old, when they give a kick, we make them shout. Why? Because if you tell a kid to support their belly, they don't understand. But when they shout, they know how to do it automatically: there is an abdominal contraction and they can strike without hurting themselves.

In yoga, at the beginning, we always do the movements after the expiration, with the belly supporting the movement. Then, we inhale. Later we will tell them: when expiring you pull in the belly, and when inhaling you keep it supported. The belly becomes flexible. Then you could do movements during the four respiratory times. The belly is always kept supported.

But the emptiness is a sacred moment; it is a bit of a sacrilege to move in emptiness. At the beginning there is no option, but later the movement is usually done in the retention at full lungs. Why? Because in both expiration and inspiration dozens of muscles intervene. We seek to make a movement without muscular activity. That idea of "when I straighten up I inhale, when I bend I exhale"... that

comes from Swedish gymnastics of the 1880s, it's not traditional yoga.

The movement is done during the retention. Then, with the years, the retentions become very long. \*Jean Klein\* used to say that for him the comfortable retention time in the poses was 40 seconds. The retention time is the minimum time of comfort. Gradually it is increased.

There are other schools that say the opposite, like those of \*Desikachar\* or \*Krishnamacharya\*. They have other points of view, respectable, but the objective is not the same. They have a religious or purification objective. But to discover one's own availability on the direct path, our technology is the one that best corresponds.

[Interlocutor]: So, when you stand on your head, the energy goes down through the body...

[Éric Baret]: Absolutely. The headstand or shoulderstand is held longer because it allows this assimilation of energy. If naturalness is not sought, it is useless. You deposit yourself on the head. We work little on the variations. If you work the spine well, the headstand is sacred, it is of pure reception. The feet become like chalices. You are a pure channel. At the beginning you can play a bit, but when you are truly empty, you stay quiet. You let the energy truly descend.

Stasis has a thousand times more importance than dynamics. Muscular work only blocks the \*nāḍīs\*, the energy channels. The spine reduces itself until it is like a needle, a thin thread of energy that goes up and down. The skin disappears completely. Don't lose yourself in the variations that serve only to balance elements at 20 years old.

Static poses like \*sarvāṅgāsana\* are profound. You absorb, you absorb. You can play a bit at the beginning, move the legs, but at a certain point you have to stay still. Let the energy circulate.

[Interlocutor]: In the shoulderstand, isn't there a "break" in the neck?

[Éric Baret]: There is an external flexion, but it does not block the energy; on the contrary, it allows the energy to saturate that zone of "purity." It is like a snake rising above your head. It frees that center which is vital because it is where the positive and negative energies meet. We let the energy accumulate here.

In almost all poses the seventh cervical is slightly open. If you block there or in the lumbar zone, the energy stops. When we return from a pose, if we are trained, we never pass through verticality as not to block those points. At the beginning we

return very slowly so as not to lose energy, but if you return slowly, the energy disperses. By the time you arrived at the seated position, much has already been lost. At the beginning, returning quickly creates tensions, that's why we do it slowly. Later, when you can, you return quickly to stay in the instant.

[Interlocutor]: And after the practice?

[Éric Baret]: What follows are states close to deep sleep, but with awareness. They are very restorative moments. You have to let the body rest, let it "fall asleep" while the presence remains. If you fall asleep, recovery takes hours; if you let the body fall asleep while you remain present, it only takes 45 minutes.

It is the most important moment of the session. It is about an integration at the cellular and glandular level. If you move immediately after yoga, the muscles will absorb the energy. If you remain still, the internal organs will. This time of rest must be respected.

Each culture—Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian or Arabic—has its own "map" of organs. These are not the same as modern medical organs; they are modalities of consciousness, poetic expressions of the "pranic body." Before the physical branches of a tree grow, there is a movement of energy that precedes them: that is the "internal tree." Real yoga works with that internal movement.

[Interlocutor]: Can Yoga be mixed with Tai Chi or Qi Gong?

[Éric Baret]: Superficially, yes. Profoundly, no. In Yoga, energy is expansion: we breathe toward space. There is no rooting or "anchoring." In Tai Chi, energy is internal and centered; it is a martial art intended to keep you rooted. If you are in a headstand and someone blows on you, you can fall; that non-rooting is intentional. Tai Chi densifies the energy for individual survival and health. Yoga disperses it to create a non-intentional centering.

In Taoist or Islamic yoga (such as that of \*Dāra Shikōh\*), we find a similar internal work due to historical exchanges between India, Persia and the Arab world. But it is difficult to master both breaths simultaneously. One must master one first.

[Interlocutor]: One last question about \*prāṇāyāma\*...

[Éric Baret]: The \*prāṇāyāma\* must be done 12 times, without fatigue. Gradually, your inhalation, retention, and exhalation will triple in length over the months. But if you feel fatigue, you have to stop. Many people damage their heart or lungs by trying to increase the retention by force. That is "pure megalomania."

If you find yourself counting faster because the retention is too long, you are cheating. Shorten the retention. Never force. Always maintain a reserve of air. If you push life to its limit, you create a mental habit of "limitation." Freedom is the opposite.

[Éric Baret]: Well, thank you very much everyone for coming. It's been a pleasure. Have a very good day.