

STABILITY AND EASE AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE HUMAN SYSTEM

The yogic ideas of **sthira** (*stability*) and **sukha** (*ease*)– apply to every layer of the human system: the physical body, physiology, mental process, emotional responses and spiritual longings. We need to be both stable AND flexible at the same time. Veering too much toward one or the other end of the spectrum can have serious consequences to our health and wellbeing.



On the **physical level**, being too tight manifests as **muscle tension**, restricted movement and the whole body being “stuck” in a posture that you assume for most of your day. Being too loose leads to overall **structural instability**, overworked muscles that have to both move the body and hold it together, sacroiliac joint pain, dislocations and so on. This is exacerbated by the fact that many yoga practitioners are intent on increasing their flexibility, whether it is serving them or not.



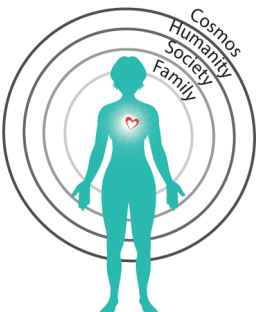
On the **physiological level**, the functioning of most our bodily systems (digestive, circulatory, immune and so on) is tied to the state of our autonomic nervous system (ANS). The two branches of the ANS are always wrestling each other – if you find yourself in **“fight-and-flight” mode** most of the time (which is activated by the sympathetic nervous system) you will end up “tightly-wound”, stressed out and jumpy, which places great wear and tear on your entire system. On the other hand, if you mostly reside in **“rest-and-digest” mode** (which is activated by the parasympathetic nervous system), you might get lethargic, have trouble rising up to challenges and getting motivated for anything.



On the level of **mental processing**, we know that **rigid thinking** can become a mental block that prevents us from accepting and processing new information, keeps us stuck in our habitual patterns and stifles creativity. At the other end of the spectrum, constant mental distraction and **inability to sustain focus** impact every aspect of our lives including work, relationships, hobbies and health.



On the level of **personality and emotions**, too much tightness manifests as being a “bottler”, while too much looseness with one’s emotions leads to “brooding”. **“Bottling”** pushes the unwanted feelings aside while trying to present an upbeat and chipper front. The problem is that NOT thinking about something takes enormous mental energy and suppressed emotions are bound to leak out in some other unfortunate ways. **“Brooding”** manifests as stirring uncomfortable emotions over and over, unable to let go. This can lead to worry, obsession and exaggeration of even the slightest misfortunes.



And on the level of **spiritual longing**, we know that **rigid fundamentalist beliefs** can lead to intolerance, bigotry and exclusion of aspects of reality that do not conform to those beliefs. On the other hand, the **inability to connect** to anything greater than oneself leaves many people disconnected, adrift and unhappy.

Yoga offers us tools to work toward balance between stability and ease at each one of those levels. The choice of appropriate yogic tools depends on which level of the system needs more tuning.