

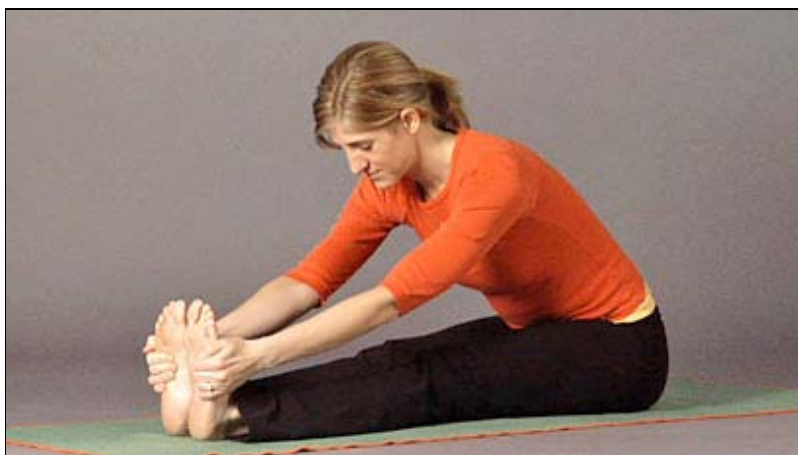
Beyond the mat and into the world

Eco-warrior Albert Koehl will speak about how yoga can fuel activism at three-day weekend event

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LIVING REPORTER

Yoga involves much more than performing physical poses to develop personal peace – and a new festival is aimed at celebrating that.



Toronto Star writer and yoga teacher Daphne Gordon demonstrates the Forward Bend.

"The whole point of it is to activate the community," says Scott Petrie, a co-director of the not-for-profit Yoga Festival, set to run Friday to Sunday at the glittering National Ballet School space on Jarvis St.

"Toronto is a great yoga city," Petrie says. "A lot of people practise yoga here, maybe 20,000 or so, which is a great thing in a personal sense – better health and a sense of spirituality. But what was lacking was a sense that we're all practising yoga in Toronto, and how can we help each other, and how can we help the place where we're practising."

Together with two other local teachers – Matthew Remski and Dennison Smith of Renaissance Yoga and Ayurveda – and drawing on expertise and volunteer help from about 50 local studios, Petrie conceived the festival as a grassroots, locally driven show that aims to take yoga beyond the mat and into the world.

That's what sets it apart from other yoga shows and conferences in North America today, he says.

Organizers have opted for ecologically sustainable practices that include carbon offsets for every aspect of the show, a communal dinner prepared from local foods, and an event schedule that includes a talk from local eco-warrior Albert Koehl, who will speak about how yoga can fuel activism.

It's about connecting the inner peace that's earned through yoga with a sense of responsibility for bringing peace to the outside world, says Andrea Peloso, a local yoga teacher and long-time activist who volunteers on the festival's board.

"We hope the festival will help people come to see that contributing to their communities is a possible way to bring peace to the world. And we hope that people who are already

activists will feel supported in that."

Dialogue is the way to do that, says Petrie, noting that festival organizers had no North American models to turn to when they created their class schedule.

"The yoga community lacks an open, more universal approach to the truth. There is no dialogue," he says, explaining that the tradition of yoga's many branches, gurus and styles have led to isolation and fragmentation – which prevents cross-fertilization of ideas.

"We thought, `What if we put them in a room together and asked them to defend their position and to put their idea out there for criticism?'" he says, explaining the thinking behind two round-table discussions scheduled for Friday and Saturday evenings.

Topics will include how a solitary pursuit can have social relevance in the modern world, and whether the ancient seers who divined the yoga teachings through meditation foresaw global warming.

Registration ranges from \$115 for a half-day to \$328 for a three-day pass. For more information, see yogafestivaltoronto.org.