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// MULTIDIRECTIONAL YOGA: THINK OUTSIDE THE RECTANGLE

BY DEDE DANIELS

For thousands of years, yoga practitioners have faced their bodies deliberately in one direction or another; toward the rising or setting sun, toward what they deem to be their 'Mecca', or in the case of a yoga pose named Intense Stretch to the West, towards due west.

The practice of Yoga Mala is typically the performance of 108 Sun Salutations, in sets of 27, each facing north, south, east, and west. So where does one place one's mat to accommodate these traditions? Does the mat have to be moved several times during class? And should you, the teacher, carry a compass?! There must be a better way of accommodating these moves, and a way which will allow us to create new movement possibilities.

A COMFORTABLE CONFINEMENT?

Before it was possible to buy a yoga mat at just about any sports equipment store, freedom of movement was not an issue as yoga was performed on surfaces such as large rugs, blankets or even the bare floor. Although this may be an option in some facilities which have carpeted floors, nothing beats using the proper equipment: a spongy, non-skid yoga mat made of natural rubber or PVC. But, while the rectangular surface area of these mats may helpfully delineate our comfort zone of personal space when practicing in a group, at the same time, being held within these confines can create limitations and reduce the feeling of being free to move.

YOGA ALL AROUND

As facilitators of yoga, teachers are limited to keeping their students aligned properly on their mats for reasons of safety and comfort, especially when practicing on hardwood floors. However, it is easy to combine freedom of directional movement with the safety and comfort of a yoga mat by simply placing a second traditionally shaped, rectangular mat on top of the first to create a 'cross' formation. This opens up many new possibilities for poses, transitions, safety, and comfort.

The benefits of multidirectional movement in yoga are manifold, and include:

- a new feel to familiar poses
- unique transitions
- easier segues
- safer/easier 'jumping' transitions
- improved visibility between students and teacher
- new pose creation based on unique foot placement.

Alternatively, if using two mats does not appeal, you may acquire a round-shaped yoga mat.

A ROUND YOGA MAT?

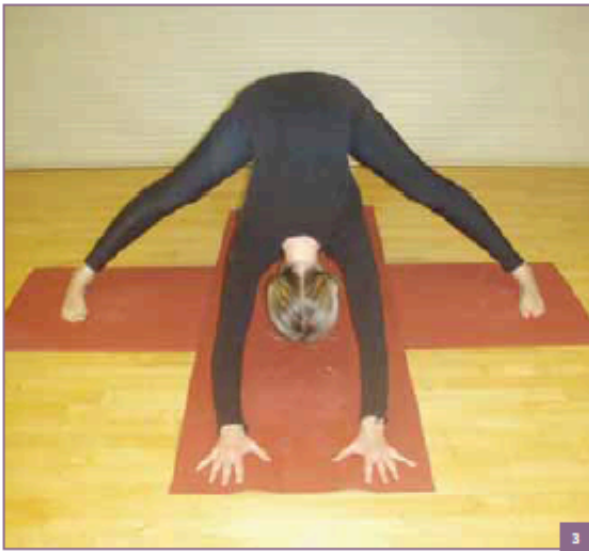
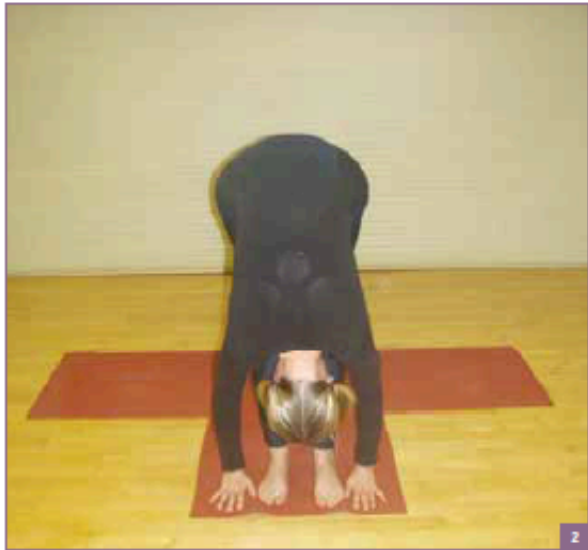
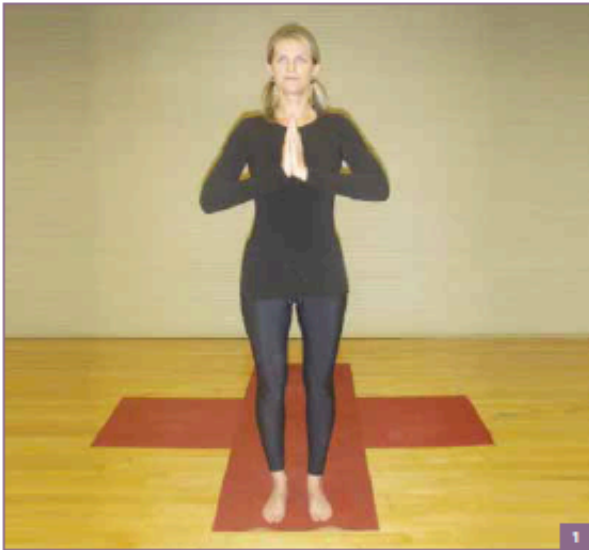
Desiree Bartlett (desibartlett.com), together with lululemon athletica, recently developed the circular 360° Yoga Mat, which, because of its round shape, allows freedom of directional movement during yoga practices. This innovation stemmed from Desiree's need, as a former dancer and yoga facilitator, to move her students in ellipses and spirals and to not be limited to the very linear movements that a single rectangular yoga mat dictates. The round mat also has a cross shape embossed on its surface which helps users orientate themselves within the circle.

MULTIDIRECTIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY

Whether choosing the two-mat or the round-mat variation, having more options can open new avenues of creativity and stimulate your inner Bob Fosse ...

The following poses illustrate the freedom of movement that is possible when two mats are combined for the purpose of instructing multidirectional choreography.

Mountain Pose (at the front of vertical mat) (photo 1)
Swan Dive
Standing Forward Fold (photo 2) – step or jump back to horizontal mat into;
Standing Straddle (photo 3) – walk hands around to side and then come up into;
Triangle (photo 4) – come upright into;
Warrior II (photo 5) – come down and walk hands to centre into;
Standing Straddle (photo 3) – walk hands to other side and repeat from Triangle, then walk hands to centre into;
Standing Straddle (photo 3) – step or jump forward into;
Standing Forward Fold (photo 2)
Reverse Swan Dive – standing back up into;
Mountain Pose (photo 1) – at the front of vertical mat.



THE TRADITION LIVES ON

Patañjali's ancient text, the Yoga Sutras tells us that, 'Asanas (poses) should be steady and pleasant.' By crossing the two traditional mats over one another, extra padding (in the centre of the cross, where the two mats intersect) is found only where it is needed, for the knees, pelvis, and spine for increased comfort, making poses more pleasant. Keeping the front and back of the practice areas a single-layer allows for better stability or steadiness – an aspect of yoga every bit as important as comfort. In the case of the round 360° Yoga Mat, it may be folded in half, or have an additional rectangular yoga mat (or two) placed beneath it for more cushioning.

TRAVEL FREELY

With appropriate amounts of non-skid padding in the right places, and the freedom to move in all directions, where will teachers take their students next? Wherever one's yoga journey leads, bliss is surely a travelling companion. Are we there yet?

DeDe Daniels, E-RYT

Co-creator of the flow-yoga® teacher training and education program, DeDe has taught movement and worked one-on-one with clients in Los Angeles for over two decades. She has trained thousands of fitness professionals worldwide and is a registered yoga teacher with the Yoga Alliance at their highest level. For more information e-mail dede@flow-yoga.com

NETWORK • SUMMER 2008 • PP52-53