

Class 2: The Torso Mandala & Spine

Welcome

This class centers on the Torso Mandala—a region that includes the spine and surrounding core tissues. The spine is capable of five essential movements:

- Flexion (forward bending)
- Extension (backbending)
- Lateral flexion (side bending)
- Rotation (twisting)
- Axial elongation (lengthening)

Throughout this class, we explore each of these movements gently and intentionally through Yin postures and somatic awareness practices.

Every pose in this class offers benefits to the musculoskeletal system, helping to:

- Rehydrate fascia
- Encourage functional range of motion
- Gently decompress the spine
- Support better posture and breath
- Unwind habitual tension along the body's central axis

We organize today's poses into two major myofascial focus areas:

Rectus Abdominis (the front body's midline support)

This long sheath of muscle extends from the sternum to the pubic bone and plays a vital role in flexion, core support, and breath regulation. Postures that gently lengthen or stimulate this area help release gripping patterns across the belly and chest, while improving spinal mobility and core awareness.

Obliques (the side-body spiral lines)

The internal and external obliques wrap diagonally around the torso and are responsible for twisting and side-bending. These tissues support spinal stability and mobility and are deeply connected to our sense of groundedness and flow. Poses that target the obliques often also affect the ribs, waist, and breath rhythm.

By slowing down and bringing awareness to these areas, we invite not just flexibility—but connection, clarity, and a deeper relationship with the body's natural intelligence.

A Note on Yin Yoga

Yin yoga is a slow, introspective practice that targets the body's connective tissues—ligaments, joints, and fascia—rather than muscles. We stay in poses longer, often using props to support the body in stillness. This functional approach invites sensation and awareness without striving or force, making room for deeper connection to how each shape feels in your body.

In this series, Yin is the vehicle we use to develop somatic awareness—learning to observe sensation, identify where we feel it, and recognize how it changes with time, breath, and subtle shifts. The goal is not to "stretch deeper" but to feel more honestly.

Rebound

After each shape, we pause in a neutral position to feel the rebound. This moment allows the body to recalibrate. As fluids shift, sensations integrate, and energetic movement rebalances. This pause is not a counterpose—it's a space of feeling without doing.

We practice rebound based on the teachings of Paul and Suzee Grilley, allowing time and stillness to complete the cycle of each pose.

Yin yoga can support:

- Improved mobility and range of motion
- Release of muscle tension and soreness
- Better sleep, digestion, and emotional regulation
- Circulation of blood, fluids, and Qi (energy)
- Nervous system calming and a deeper connection to your inner landscape

Practice Tips

- Every body is different—there's no hierarchy in poses. Use props, adapt as needed, and honor your own structure and sensation.
- Avoid sharp pain or numbness. If something doesn't feel right, ease out and rest or ask for a variation.
- Rebounds (short neutral pauses between poses) are used to support integration and allow fluids and energy to harmonize. These moments are just as important as the shapes themselves.
- Wear what feels good. Yoga leggings not required! Have a blanket and socks nearby—your body temperature may shift as you settle.
- Emotions may arise—or not. Yin invites us to soften and spend time with ourselves. This can surface unexpected feelings, or it may simply feel peaceful. All experiences are valid.

What Is Somatics?

Somatics is a body-centered approach to awareness and well-being. Rather than focusing on how a movement looks, it invites you to feel how it feels. This inward orientation supports nervous system balance, helps dissolve habitual tension, and fosters a deeper relationship with your body's natural intelligence.

In the Body Mandala series, we use somatics to build awareness of sensation, explore our capacity for choice, and move with greater clarity, ease, and self-trust.

Self-Guided Somatic Practice: Torso & Spine

This short practice invites you to slow down and feel into the central channel of the body. Use it before or after your Yin practice, or on its own as a form of somatic inquiry.

Settle:

Begin lying on your back with your knees bent and feet wide, letting the knees lean inward. Feel the weight of your body settling. Let your breath arrive naturally.

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Self-Guided Somatic Practice: Torso & Spine (continued)

Breath Awareness:

Place one hand on your belly, the other on your chest. Feel the movement of your breath. Notice where it goes, where it doesn't, and how it shifts over time.

Micro-Movements:

- Gently roll your head side to side, noticing any asymmetry or tension.
- Slowly draw your right shoulder toward your right hip (a tiny movement), then release. Repeat on the left.
- Let your spine gently arc and soften, exploring a small arch and release through your low back.

Inquiry Prompt:

Where in my torso do I tend to hold or brace?

What happens when I soften into sensation instead of pushing it away?

Close:

Pause in stillness. Let your body settle. Notice any after-sensations, shifts, or openings. Let integration unfold without needing to label it.

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Spine (Thoracolumbar + Cervical Fascia)

Pose Name	Hatha Name	Primary Target	Secondary Target
Butterfly	Baddha Konasana	Spine	Groin
Caterpillar	Paschimottanasana	Spine	Hamstrings
Half-Butterfly	Janu Sirsasana	Spine	Hamstrings, Glutes, IT-Band
Snail	Halasana	Spine	Shoulders
Squat	Malasana	Spine	Ankles
Dangling	Uttanasana	Spine	Hamstrings, Shoulders
Graceful Bow	Balasana variation	Spine	Chest

Obliques (Lateral Fascial Lines)

Pose Name	Hatha Name	Primary Target	Secondary Target
Banana	Bananasana	Side body, Obliques	Glutes & IT band, chest, shoulders
Mermaid	Parighasana	Side body, Obliques	Glutes & IT band, chest, shoulders
Seated Sidebends	Parivrtta Sukhasana	Obliques	Thoracic spine

Rectus Abdominis (Front Line Fascial Plane)

Pose Name	Hatha Name	Primary Target	Secondary Target
Seal	Bhujangasana	Rectus abdominis, Spine	Hip flexors
Sphinx	Salamba Bhujangasana	Rectus abdominis, Spine	Shoulders
Supported Bridge	Setu Bandhasana (prop at sacrum)	Rectus abdominis, Spine	Pelvic floor, psoas
Supported Bridge	Setu Bandhasana (thoracic prop)	Rectus abdominis, Spine	Diaphragm
Camel	Ustrasana	Front body, Rectus abdominis, Spine	Quads, hip flexors
Up Dragon	Anjaneyasana	Rectus abdominis, Spine, Hip Flexors	Chest, Quads, Glutes & IT-Band
Up Swan	Eka Pada Rajakapotasana	Rectus abdominis, Spine	Hip flexors, Glutes & IT-Band
Saddle	Supta Virasana	Abdominals, Hip Flexors, Quads	Knees, ankles

Spinal Twists (Rotational)

Pose Name	Hatha Name	Primary Target	Secondary Target
Easy Twists	Parivrtta Sukhasana	Spine, Obliques	Shoulders, ribs
Twisted Root	Supta Matsyendrasana	Spine, Obliques	Glutes & IT band
Cat Tail	Supine twist variation	Spine, Obliques	Quads, chest, hamstrings
Rolling Panda	Supine twist variation	Spine, Obliques	Cervical spine
Twisting Deer	Supine or seated twist	Spine, Obliques	Glutes & IT band, Hip Flexors, Quads
Seated Twist	Ardha Matsyendrasana	Spine, Obliques	Shoulder girdle
Twisting Child's Pose	Balasana variation	Spine, Obliques	Chest, arms, groin
Twisting Dragon	Lunge twist variation	Spine, Obliques	Hip flexors, Quads, Glutes & IT band

Questions? Curiosities? Let's connect!
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