

## Class 3: The Torso Mandala & Spine Opening, Stabilizing, and Releasing the Upper Body

This class centers on the Wings Mandala — the intricate network of the shoulder girdle, arms, and upper spine.

The shoulder girdle allows for a beautiful range of expressions and movements, including:

- Elevation and depression (lifting and lowering)
- Protraction and retraction (rounding and drawing back)
- Rotation and stabilization
- Reaching, holding, and releasing gestures

Throughout this class, we explore these actions gently and intentionally through Yin postures and somatic awareness practices, with an emphasis on cultivating freedom, stability, and energetic openness in the upper body.

Every pose and practice offers benefits to the musculoskeletal and fascial systems, helping to:

- Create spaciousness in the shoulders, chest, and upper back
- Rehydrate and mobilize connective tissues
- Encourage healthy scapular movement and shoulder stability
- Support freer breath and energetic flow
- Unwind habitual tension patterns across the upper body and arms

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Whether you are continuing from earlier Mandala explorations or joining anew, these practices are designed to meet you where you are — offering an accessible, embodied approach to feeling more rooted, resilient, and expansive through your wings.

### 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
- Move with greater clarity, ease, and self-trust



## Somatic Explorations

### Supine Neck and Shoulder Release

Setup: Lying supine in constructive rest (knees bent, feet on floor) or legs extended if preferred. Place the right palm under the side of the head, cradling the ear.

Exploration:

- Phase 1: Gently press the side of the head into the palm, engaging neck muscles. Release fully. Repeat 5 times, pausing for a breath between each.
- Phase 2: Keeping the setup, gently press the elbow into the floor, noticing engagement through the arm, shoulder, and chest. Release fully. Repeat 5 times, pausing for breath.
- Phase 3: Press the head into the hand and the elbow into the floor simultaneously, creating a unified gesture of engagement. Release fully. Repeat 5 times.
- After Phase 3, gently roll the head back to center and release the arm down. Rest and reflect.

Benefits: Enhances awareness of unconscious holding patterns; teaches the nervous system how to consciously engage and release tension; supports healthier integration between head, neck, and upper body movements.

### Receptive Gesture Exploration

Setup: Seated or lying down, arms free.

Exploration:

Slowly move the arms into different shapes - reaching, folding, opening, crossing. Notice where you feel stable, open, vulnerable, or guarded.

Benefits: Builds emotional fluency through movement; fosters agency and comfort in physical openness.

## Self-Myofascial Release (MFR) Technique

### Suboccipital MFR with Yoga Block

- Setup: Lying supine, place the edge of a yoga block under the base of the skull (suboccipital ridge).
- Technique: Allow the head to rest fully; micro-movements nodding "yes" and "no" encourage the block to gently massage tight suboccipital muscles.
- Benefits: Releases tension in the neck, improves parasympathetic tone, encourages upper body freedom.

Questions? Curiosities? Let's connect!  
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## 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 space for a 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, notice where we feel it, and recognize how it shifts with time, breath, and subtle movement.

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 natural cycle of each pose.



## Class 3: The Wings Mandala

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.

## 1. Front (Anterior) Shoulder Line: Chest, Biceps

### Open Wing

- Lying prone with one arm extended at shoulder height, the body rolls gently toward the open arm, allowing the front of the shoulder and chest to melt open with gravity.
- Variation: Position the body facing a wall, seated or standing, with one arm outstretched; rotate the torso away from the wall.

### Angel Wings

- Seated (or standing) draw arms behind back, bending at elbows, hands in prayer
- Variation: Rather than prayer hands, hold opposite elbows or make a fist with one hand and press it into the opposite palm.

### Supported Thoracic Bridge

- Supported Fish Pose (Matsyasana Variation)

#### Secondary Target Area: spine

- Reclining over a bolster or block placed beneath the mid-back, the chest softly blooms open, encouraging breath into the heart center and release through the shoulders.

### Lounging Monkey

- Sit with legs long, place hands on the floor behind you, fingers pointed back. Slide hands away from the body, reclining torso backwards, until you feel sensation to the front of the shoulders and insides of the arms. More sensation is not necessarily better.
- Variation: recline over a bolster for comfort or try this seated or standing, against a wall.

### Sphinx

- Salamba Bhujangasana

Primary: Spine, rectus abdominus

Secondary: Shoulders and Chest

- Lay prone, lift chest and shoulders and extend spine upwards, while supporting weight on the forearms with bent elbows.. Tilt the chin toward the sky to stretch the front body more deeply, or drop head to hang heavily for release to the shoulders. Legs can be any width apart. Allow the glutes to relax.

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## 2. Side Body / Lateral Chain

### Melting Heart

- Anahatasana Variation

Targets: Chest, armpits, side body

- From hands and knees, the chest drapes downward between the arms in an offering of softness, opening the sides of the body and underarms.
- This is not a shoulder stretch. You should not feel pinching or pain in the shoulders.. Explore the width of your arms and the bend in your elbows to find comfort here.

### Child's Pose

- Balasana Variation

Targets: Chest, armpits, side body

- From Child's Pose, walk both hands to one side to open through the ribs and side body.

### Banana / Crescent

Targets: Side body: chest, shoulders, obliques, glutes, and IT band

- Lying on the back, the body arcs gently to one side, creating a long, sweet opening through the side waist, ribs, and outer shoulder.

### Graceful Bow

Targets: Cervical spine, shoulders

- Sit or stand comfortably. Gently tilt one ear toward the shoulder on the same side, feeling sensation through the middle of the opposite side of the neck. Hold here for a few breaths.
- Then, rotate the nose toward the sky. You'll feel the stretch travel toward the front of the opposite side of the neck. Pause and breathe.
- Next, rotate the nose downward toward the chest. You'll feel the pull shift toward the back of the opposite side of the neck. Pause and breathe.
- To increase sensation: Place the opposite hand (the hand away from the tilt) on the floor or on a block at about a 45-degree angle. Rest the other hand gently on top of the head, allowing its weight (without applying pressure) to deepen the stretch naturally.

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### 3. Back (Posterior) Shoulder Line: Upper Back & Outer Arms

#### Closed Wing

- Lying prone, one arm threads across the chest under the body. Rolling onto the extended arm gently draws sensation through the back of the shoulder.

#### Mother Hen

- Seated with soles of the feet together and knees wide, the backs of the hands rest against the waist. Elbows rest inside the thighs, creating a grounded stretch across the outer arms, backside of the shoulders, and wrists.

Primary Target Areas: Posterior shoulders, outer arms, wrists

#### Eagle Arms

- Garudasana Arms

Secondary Target Area: spine

- Sitting tall, the arms intertwine at elbows and wrists, broadening the space across the upper back and shoulders.

#### Cow-Faced Arms

- Gomukhasana Arms

- One elbow lifts overhead while the other reaches behind the back. Hands seek each other or hold a strap, gently opening shoulders and upper arms.
- This shape is special in that it targets the inner arm and tricep of one side while opening the outer shoulder and upper arm of the other.

#### Rolling Panda

Secondary: Spine

- Start in an all-fours position (tabletop). Thread one arm underneath the body, lowering the shoulder and side of the head to the mat. Gently tuck the chin toward the chest to lengthen the back of the neck.
- The non-threaded arm can: Rest alongside the body or extend forward for more opening through the back, or wrap behind the back (option to bind to the inner thigh) to encourage a gentle heart opening.
- Legs can stay bent in a tabletop shape, or the leg opposite the threaded arm can extend out to the side to create additional sensation through the back and side body.
- Allow the movement to be soft and supported, using the breath to guide subtle shifts and deeper release.

#### Hammock

Primary: Hamstrings & calves, spine

Secondary: Releases shoulders

- Using a 10-foot strap, create a loop around one foot and cradle the back of the head (not compressing the neck). Roll onto your back and tighten or adjust the strap until you feel the desired sensation: a lengthening pull along the back of the lifted leg and a supportive "hammocking" sensation around the head.
- Let the shoulders and upper body soften fully into the mat, allowing tension to melt away.
- Keep the lifted leg active but not rigid, and relax the weight of the head into the strap for a gentle cervical release.

Alternative Pose: Caterpillar Pose (seated forward fold with head relaxed downward) can be substituted if preferred.

*Thank you so much for joining this workshop.  
Hope to practice with you again soon.*