

Why Lotus?

What is the big deal with Lotus Pose, anyway? That position, also known as *pretzel pose* because of the way your legs wrap over each other, can be difficult to get into and hard to stay in. It can even be painful. So: What's the big deal?

Well it turns out there are many good reasons for sitting in that manner. Let's start with the most basic: The desire to emulate those who inspire us.

Emulate Our Heroes

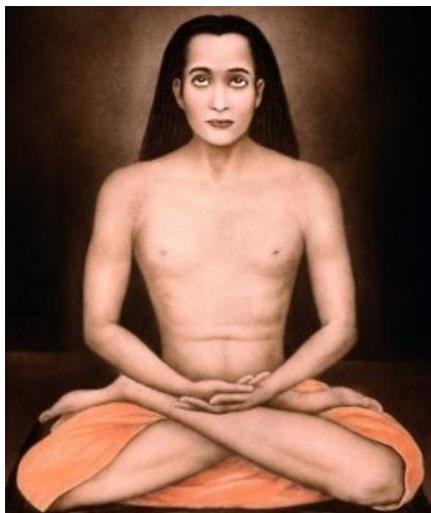
The teachers, gurus, and saints who have inspired us are, quite naturally, our heroes. We want to be like them. Following that desire, we become like them. As we do, the human species evolves.

Our desire is based on a simple principle: We may not know *why* they do what they do, at the start, but as we progress we will *discover* the reason. In the future, if we discover that it serves no real purpose, we may discard the practice. Or we may continue it for the very human emotional reason that it makes us *feel* like them, and brings us *closer* to them.

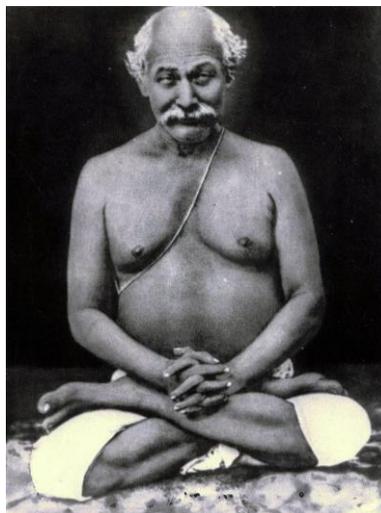
When it comes to deep, emotional *motivation*, that is reason enough. And most of us have a been exposed to sculptures, pictures, and drawings that suggest it is a good idea. Next, we'll look at some of those.

Kriya Yoga

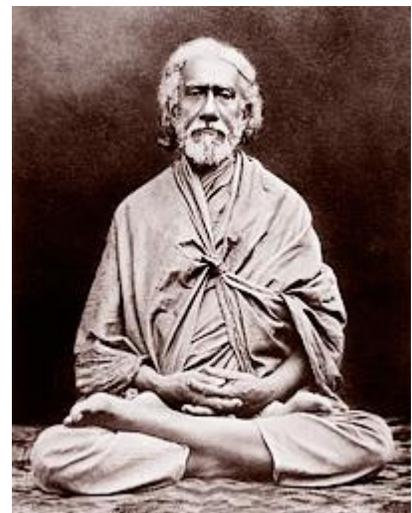
In the Kriya Yoga tradition that was a major inspiration for my energy-based meditation practice, the sages, saints, rishis (wise ones), and siddhas (adepts) who founded that lineage are more often than not shown in Lotus Pose.



Babaji



Lahiri Mahasaya



Sri Yukteswar

Paintings and Sculptures

Or perhaps you have been influenced by the many paintings, sculptures, and drawings in which Lotus Pose is pretty much synonymous with yoga.



Shiva



Buddha



Saraswati



**Boganathar
(Babaji's guru)**



Krishna



Depiction of Chakras

Many Other Good Reasons

Emotional motivations aside, there are many good *reasons* for sitting in Lotus Pose. In this section, we'll talk about the rationale.

Parts of this section are extracted from Subtle Energy Yoga, Volume 1 (Foundations): [Bench Yoga](#)

General Benefits of Sitting Cross-Legged

When you can sit comfortably in any cross-legged position, you can sit most anywhere. You can be comfortable on a carpeted floor (especially if there is a carpet under it). Or you can sit outdoors on a hillside, or next to a lake or stream.

Anywhere the ground is soft and has a slight forward tilt, you can sit comfortably to rest, to meditate, or simply to soak in the energy of the location. That's pretty great, if only because you don't have to carry a chair with you everywhere you go!

Specific Benefits of Lotus Pose

Lotus Pose is highly desirable, for some very good reasons.

Important!

Here, I am talking about being able to sit in Lotus Position **without strain**. If you have to force yourself into position, or have to strain to stay there, you risk injury, and will most likely do yourself more harm than good. So take it easy, and go to Lotus position *when you're ready* to get there.

Sit Anywhere

In Lotus Pose, your ankles and shins are nowhere near the surface you're sitting on. They're top of your thighs. The only things in contact with the ground are the soft undersides of your thighs and your backside.

As a result, you no longer need a soft surface. You can sit on a hard floor, or a rock, and be just comfortable as if you were sitting home in a Barcalounger.

No Need for a Seat Cushion

Another reason for wanting to sit in Lotus is that you no longer even need a seat cushion! In other cross-legged positions, a cushion helps you achieve the tilted pelvis you need to sit upright.

Sitting in a chair without pelvic tilt, your torso has a tendency to fall backward. So your muscles have to work harder to hold yourself upright.

To keep those muscles from getting sore, people began adding a *back* to their chairs. But it was the wrong solution! Sitting in a leaned back position is comfortable, sure. But when you do it all the time, you *weaken* the muscles you need to sit upright.

A better solution is more *pelvic tilt*, which is secret behind the many wedge pads and tilted-seats that promise to alleviate back pain.

So pelvic tilt is good, when sitting in normal positions. It puts your torso over the center of the triangle created by knees and backside. In that position, the tendency to fall backwards is reduced, which reduces the workload on your muscles.

And one way to achieve that tilt is by sitting on the edge of a seat cushion.

But when sitting in Lotus Pose, a cushion is uncomfortable! With your feet on top of your thighs, your knees can no longer get down to the bench (or floor). So if they wind up hovering in air, removing critical points of support from what should be a stable triangle from your backside to your knees.

So while a seat cushion is a help in most every other position, it is actually a hindrance in Lotus Pose.

Finding Your Balance

When your feet are on your thighs, your pelvis achieves a natural tilt—just enough of one to bring you a balanced position. And, in Lotus, your legs are “locked in” in a way that

counterbalances your torso. The result is a perfectly balanced, perfectly upright spine, with a minimal exertion of muscular energy.

And because Lotus pose keeps you from *over*-arching your back, making it that much easier to find the point of perfect balance.

“Locked In” and Stable

Another important reason for wanting to sit in Lotus is that it is almost impossible to fall over. *Because* you can't fall over, you can fully relax to the point that you might even start to fall asleep.

But when that happens, you are woken up by a slight nod of the head, rather than by falling over. That's important because, if your body falls over, it produces an *adrenaline response* that takes you right out of your relaxed, meditative state.

At the same time, you want to be so fully relaxed that you are at the *threshold* of sleep. That threshold is known as the alpha/theta crossover. We'll talk more about that state next. For now, the important point is that waking from a nod of the head helps you stay in that state.

Alpha/Theta Crossover

When you're in the *alpha* state, you're relaxed and aware. In the *theta* state, you're sleeping.

In the *deep alpha* state, you're extremely relaxed, and very close to sleeping. When you cross over into *light theta*, you begin to dream as you access images and sensations that are beyond (or below) your conscious awareness.

When you are in deep meditation, you're not on one side of the boundary or the other. Instead, you *dip down* into theta for a bit, then *rise up* into alpha, and repeat the cycle.

That's known as the *Alpha/Theta Crossover* state.

That state is important, because you are interacting directly with your subconscious mind. In that state, subconscious memories can surface and rise into conscious awareness.

Thoughts, suggestions, ideas, and affirmations can go the other way, as well. In that state, your affirmations bypass your conscious filters and go directly into your subconscious, where they are perceived as *truth*—an internal understanding that is integrated into your being, which no conscious logic can touch.

That state is the foundation for hypnotism, affirmation therapy, lucid dreaming, sleep learning, and Yoga Nidra (a near-sleep affirmation process). It's what makes those practices work. In that state, you are in touch with deep emotional memories that dominate our thinking and decision-making processes, in ways we generally neither recognize nor understand. It is a time when you can access those memories, and (if you want) change the self-perceptions and decisions that are based on them.

That state is also the basis of really *deep* meditation. Other sitting positions help to pave the way. They let you meditate well enough to make a huge difference in your life. But to go really deep, you need Lotus Pose.

Note:

It is worth repeating that here, I am talking about a Lotus Position that you can assume *easily*, and maintain *comfortably*. Anything else produces injury that *harms* your vehicle. It's like getting a flat tire on a remote road—except you don't have a spare! You want a strong vehicle that will carry you *comfortably* on your journey to enlightenment. So take it easy!

From Human Brick to Human Pretzel

Let's say you are convinced that Lotus Pose is a good idea, well worth pursuing. The next question is how on earth do you get there, after a lifetime of sitting on chairs in West?

If you grew up in one of many ethnic subcultures in America, sitting cross-legged may not be as much of a problem. Many of them have a tradition of sitting on the floor. If you grew up in one of those traditions, you're a lot closer to Lotus than the rest of us. But you still may need help! How do you get it?

The answer, in both cases, is the [TreeLight Yoga/Meditation Sitting Bench](#) (to give it's full descriptive name), or the "Yoga Meditation Bench", for short. To understand why, we'll start by examining the problems with standard yoga techniques.

Note:

Several props designed specifically for yoga asanas already call themselves a "yoga bench". There are also *kneeling* meditation benches designed for Buddhist practices stemming from China and Japan. So for clarity, "Yoga Meditation Bench" is the most non-ambiguous name available. (But that doesn't stop me from calling it a "Yoga Bench", much of the time!)

The Flexibility Problem in Standard Yoga

Yoga often uses gravity to assist your stretching process. But when you're first starting out, gravity is of little help! For positions like forward bends, you can't bend far enough to do any good.

Those poses are critical for hip flexibility, so with a standard floor-based yoga program, you can't make much progress at all, when you start. Later, they're terrific! But when you're first starting, it's hard to make any real progress.

Then there are poses like the Butterfly, where you put the soles of your feet together and bring them in as close as you gain. A lack of hip and groin flexibility generally puts your knees up around your ears when you first start.

To improve flexibility in those areas, standard yoga practices (which should know better) often advocate bouncing—raising your knees up as far as you can and then pushing them down as fast and as far as you can.

That's another technique that works pretty well when you're *already* flexible. You can get some momentum and actually induce a bit of stretching—if you don't hurt yourself. But for the beginner, the difference between "up" and "down" is about an inch. So no momentum, no stretching, and very little progress.

In general, then, standard yoga has the problem that it *takes* flexibility to *get* flexibility. (Don't get me wrong. I love yoga! But there better ways for a beginner to start, and more meditative versions of yoga to pursue.)

The Strength Problem in Standard Yoga

Of course, you need particular kinds of strength to sit well, as well as flexibility, and many of the standard yoga poses help to develop the strength you need.

For example, Cobra pose done properly does a great job of strengthening the upper back muscles used to hold your torso upright. That's *why* you're not supposed to use your arms—to develop that strength in the upper back.

Even though such techniques are effective, however, standard yoga practices are generally oblivious to the ways in which *focused muscle tension* can help you develop the required musculature more effectively. Such practices not only increase strength more rapidly, they increase flexibility more rapidly, as well.

At the same time, they warm you up for the activities that follow. For example, when neck stretches are followed by neck circles in a yoga class, I invariably experience creaking and crunching in the neck. But when I do the stretches with *focused tension* (gradually contracting the working muscle to extend as far as I can), I find that there is no creaking at all when I follow those stretches with neck circles.

And as if it didn't do enough already, focused muscle tension also increase *internal energy flows*. In other words, they *raise chi*!

Using the Bench for Lotus Pose

With the bench, you can sit in *Full Lotus* position, or *Half Lotus*, where you have one foot on top and the other under you. Both of those are the same as sitting on the floor. (It's just easier to get up and down.)

But the bench gives you a third option: You can sit in *Quarter Lotus*, with one foot in [Half Lotus](#) position and the other the floor. That position lets you develop the flexibility you need, one leg at a time.

With multiple positions, you sit longer.

Meditating Your Way to Lotus

The key to meditation is sitting in a stable, upright, and totally balanced position. In that position, your back is relaxed and energy can flow freely in the spine and other *subtle energy channels* in the torso.

The bench was designed for comfortable meditation. As easy to get in and out of as a chair, it lets you sit as though on the floor, or sit as though in a chair, or sit in *many* intermediate positions. And when your legs get tired, it's easy to change positions.

Of course, the back muscles need to be *strong enough* to maintain that posture. And until you develop the *flexibility* you need to sit in that manner, those muscles work harder than they need to, and tire more quickly.

At the beginning then, your meditations may last only a few minutes. But the more you do them, the stronger those muscles get. After a while, you'll find yourself sitting much longer, if only because you *enjoy* it.

Great! Your back muscles are getting stronger. You can sit upright longer. Terrific! But what about your legs?

Especially if you grew up in the West, the legs will tire very quickly if you're sitting on the floor. And if your legs won't let you sit for very long, you never have a chance to develop the strength you need!

The alternative of sitting in a chair lets you improve your back strength, but it doesn't let your legs make any real progress.

The Yoga Meditation Bench solves the problem by letting you change the position of your legs when you need to, so they gradually improve, all the while sitting with an upright back.

The Bench Yoga Program

The bench by itself is a big help. But going beyond that, the *Bench Yoga* practices built around it were designed to increase the *strength* you need, as well as the *flexibility* you need, to sit well—that is, to sit in a stable, upright, balanced position where your back is totally comfortable.

The important factor is that specific kinds of strength are needed, as well as flexibility. You need strength in the *neck* to hold your head upright. You need strength in the *upper back* to lift upward and to hold your shoulders back. And you strength in the *psaos* muscles that connect the spine to the upper legs, to tilt your pelvis forward.

The muscles that need *strength* have opposing muscles that need *flexibility*. Working from the bottom up: The tilt of the pelvis is opposed by the muscles on the outside of the hips. When they are tight, that tilt is difficult to achieve. (In fact, people who have trouble with a forward bending stretch generally think the problem is their hamstrings, when at least half the problem is generally the hips.)

Similarly, the upper back muscles that are working to pull the shoulders back are opposed by tight muscles across the front of the chest (at the top).

Finally, the ability to lift the head and chest upward is greatly improved by strong *abdominal* muscles. (They don't necessarily have to be *flat* like they are when we're young, but they have to be *flatter* than they generally are when fully relaxed.)

The Bench Yoga program gives you new ways of doing standard asanas—ways that make them even more effective. It also gives you *special asanas* that develop the flexibility you need, along with *specific exercises* to build the strength you need. (As a bonus, those practices also stimulate the internal energy flows that are a prelude to profound meditation.)

Those practices are described in Volume 1 of the *Subtle Energy Yoga* series: [Bench Yoga](#). The outer physical practices are also covered in a number of [YouTube Videos](#).

The *Bench Yoga Workshop* introduces those practices, as well. In addition, it includes meditation practices and energy-activation techniques covered in later volumes of the *Subtle Energy Yoga* series.

The Bottom Line

If you want to meditate *comfortably*... If you want to meditate *deeply*... If you want to discover the *inner joy of a deep spiritual connection*... then you owe it to yourself to investigate energy-flow meditation practices.

And if you want to improve your ability to sit in advanced cross-legged positions, you owe to yourself to try a *Yoga Meditation Bench*, and to explore the *Bench Yoga* program, as well as the more advanced energy-activation techniques of *Subtle Energy Yoga*.

Learn More

Learn more about the TreeLight Yoga Meditation bench at yogaBench.TreeLight.com

For YouTube videos, see:

- The [Yoga Bench Channel](#) (use of the bench for sitting and for meditation)
- The [Bench Yoga Channel](#) (basic practices, multiple teachers)
- The [Subtle Energy Yoga Channel](#) (deeper energy-flow practices)

For a deeper discussion of techniques and practices, explore the Subtle Energy Yoga series, beginning with Volume 1 (Foundations): [Bench Yoga](#). Available for purchase at Amazon, it can also be found by retailers along with other books listed at Ingram, using its ISBN number: 978-0997240047.

To find out when Eric is giving a workshop on the subject, to hear about new books and articles as they are published, and for updates on the Yoga Meditation Bench, join the *Keys2Yoga* announcement group: groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/keys2yoga

About the Author

Eric Armstrong has spent 30 years in spiritual pursuits, including Hatha Yoga, training and teaching martial arts, exploring Tantra, and studying Raja Yoga. A former athlete and coach, he brings Western sensibilities to Eastern spirituality, creating a system that is at once deep and practical—one that focuses on the essence of Yoga: *Samadhi*, or a blissful sense of enlightenment.