



## The Mindful Commuter

Your trip to work is an opportunity to practice patience, presence, and compassion.

Transform your commute by incorporating a few things you've learned in yoga class.

MARTHA YOUNG'S DAILY drive to her Wall Street job used to make her sick. The trip was at least an hour long, and Young would spend the time with her fists clenched and face crinkled, thinking stressful thoughts. She would worry about market downturns, the breakfast with her kids that she'd missed, or upcoming layoffs. If a car cut her off, she'd think, "That jerk!"

Today, Young calls her drive "magical." When she hits a traffic jam, she considers it a gift of time to get in 500 repetitions of the Tibetan Buddhist *Vajra guru* mantra. She took up meditation six years ago and found herself chanting in the car just as she might previously have sung aloud. Her drive then became her practice time, and now if someone cuts her off, she finds herself empathizing. "It's the perfect opposite of road rage," Young says. "It's road compassion."

In the United States, the average daily commute lasts about 25 minutes each way, and more than 90

percent of commuters drive. Studies on commuting by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, have found that an increase in commuting distance relates directly to an increase in blood pressure and sick days.

Researcher Raymond Novaco, a psychologist and professor at UC Irvine, says another big threat identified by every commuting study he and his colleagues conducted was "spillover" into the home environment. "A negative mood at home in the evening was significantly impacted by evening traffic," Novaco says. And this was true no matter what the driver's age,

### BECOME A ROAD SAGE

**Listen and learn:** Study a foreign language; build your vocabulary; experience new literature.

**Practice joy:** Be present in the moment; look for beauty all around you; listen to music you love, comedians who make you laugh, chants you want to learn; count the things you are grateful for.

**Relax:** Breathe; pray or chant "Ave Maria," *Om*, or whatever suits your spirituality; do micromovements to engage and relax each part of your body: Pay attention to your posture, soften your facial expression, and relax your hands on the wheel.

**Practice compassion:** Imagine the life events that could be distracting another driver or causing a person to act inconsiderately; send blessings to those involved when a traffic jam is caused by an accident; be kind to other commuters and imagine the chain of kindness you can set in motion.

**Change your commute:** Consider moving or changing jobs; join a carpool; take a bike, bus, or train to work; travel at off-peak times to avoid traffic and stress.

Find more ideas online at [www.serenity2go.com](http://www.serenity2go.com), [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov), [www.bfwo.org](http://www.bfwo.org), and [www.erideshare.com](http://www.erideshare.com).

income, job satisfaction, gender, and social relationships were.

Lama Surya Das, author of *Awakening the Buddha Within* (Broadway, 1998) and Martha Young's teacher, says optimizing travel time and using it for "things that quicken the spirit" are important. "When we kill time, we deaden ourselves," he says. Das lived in Japan years ago and had a lengthy train commute, which he spent reading novels he might not otherwise have read, like *The Brothers Karamazov*. Today, he saves reading for long flights and uses shorter travel times for meditation or journaling.

Trains, buses, planes, and carpools offer time for modified asanas, seated meditations, and catching up on work and sleep. But driving your car poses a challenge: One-quarter of all car accidents are related to driver distraction, so your mind and eyes must stay on the drive. Young has found that as she counts her Tibetan chants on her wrist *mala*, she is a much more attentive driver. "I'm completely present in my car, and I'm very focused—so much so that I feel like I'm a better driver," she says.

—Carolyn Edy

## A Tribute to Esther Myers



ESTHER MYERS, yoga teacher and author of the classic guide *Yoga and You* (Shambhala, 1996), died on January 6, 2004, following a 10-year struggle with breast cancer. Esther will be remembered not only for her extraordinary classes and insightful writing but also for the courageous, honest, and loving way she lived her life.

Her vibrant yoga style evolved from 10 years of one-on-one study with the late Vanda Scaravelli, along with early certification in Iyengar Yoga. Joyful and inquisitive, grounded yet free, her approach uses gravity and the breath to allow a wavelike release of the spine.

Esther had a profound respect for individual differences and completely trusted in the body and its wisdom. She didn't want a style named for her or cookie-cutter classes that parroted her instruction. Instead, she provided a solid foundation that enabled her students to discover and clarify their own voices. Rather than teaching students what to think, Esther taught them *how* to think. That down-to-earth approach drew hundreds of people to her unique two-year teacher training program.

Esther's mother died of breast cancer at age 54, and Esther was diagnosed with the disease herself in 1994, at age 47. After undergoing a mastectomy, she created a yoga program for breast cancer patients at Mt. Sinai Hospital in her hometown of Toronto, which led to the creation of her video *Gentle Yoga for Breast Cancer Survivors*. She continued teaching, traveling, and writing with amazing energy, love, and humor—even when her cancer recurred last year.

—Carol Krucoff

### NAME THAT POSE

ON A canoeing-camping trip last summer, I found a moment of repose and a good stretch while rolling up the inflatable pad I used under my sleeping bag. I began by stretching my arms skyward. With a swan dive, I folded at the hips and came into Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). With dangling arms, I started rolling the sleeping pad away from me, deflating it while also getting a nice stretch in my back and quads. Then I walked my hands forward and continued rolling, coming into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose). After a few breaths, I came out of the pose, packed up my pad, and began the journey home.



#### Bedroll Vinyasa

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—Marianna Sullivan

Send "Name That Pose" submissions (150 words) to Nora Isaacs at 2054 University Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704 or [nisaacs@yogajournal.com](mailto:nisaacs@yogajournal.com).