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Align Right

“Turn your left foot 90 degrees and your right foot 45 degrees, align your left knee over your second toe as you bend your front knee and sink down into Warrior II...” We focus extensively on alignment during yoga classes. Does it really matter? Shouldn't we just feel where we should be? Shouldn't we just move through the poses? It does matter and it matters for multiple reasons.

Alignment of the skeletal system allows the joints to maintain their optimum openness. Using the same example of Warrior II, if the front knee did not stay in alignment, then the ankle would typically collapse inward or outward or the inside of the knee would open more than the outside. The thigh bone in the hip socket would rotate inward which could also cause the pelvis to rotate and then affect the positioning of the lower vertebrae. All this potential mess caused by one cue of knee placement. The muscles connected to the bones are what align the joints and bones. Without proper activation, we lose the benefits of the pose and continue to feed biomechanical compensations and disfunctions. By considering and keeping knee alignment, activation of hip stabilizers and rotators occurs (gluteus medius, minimus and their deep friends the external rotators) and the knee muscles are strengthened in a balanced manner improving knee cap (patella) tracking. **Aligning Right** matters.

Alignment of the body also allows the breath to be open. According to the Yoga Sutras, an ancient yoga text, the definition of a yoga pose is “where the body and breath can be steady and at ease.” If the body is out of alignment, the breath changes and can become blocked. The breath is an integral component of each pose and can be considered another layer to the pose. Back bends allow the front of the body and breath to open (ask someone who is 7 months pregnant to come into a restorative back bend and the first thing they will notice is an increase in breathing ability). Forward bends allow the breath to move to the back and side of the body while twists increase the breath's strength and help cleanse the breath. By understanding the alignment of the body and its influence on the ability to open and strengthen the breath we can feel the openness from the inside out and breathe why **Align Right** matters.

When the body is aligned, the breath is aligned, the energy of the body can also align. We have energy channels in the body known as the Chakras and the Nadis who are influenced by the position of the body and the flow of the breath. Certain poses affect these energy points and channels differently, stimulating some and calming others. By being in your optimal alignment you can balance the Chakras and allow the flow of energy through the Nadis. We feel our alignment from our energy layer and experience the balance, openness, clarity and calm we strive for through yoga.

Next time you are at a yoga class, consider the difference the alignment makes. Feel what happens when you move in and out of alignment. Feel the skeletal alignment, the space in the joints, the activation in the muscles, the openness of breath and the flow of energy within. Experience **Align Right**.

Namaste,

Suzette O'Byrne

Flow Training & Yoga

Heavens Elevated Fitness - Offsite Program Director - The Glencoe Club

Yoga Alliance Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher