

**The Busy Person's Guide to Street Yoga**  
from [The Ballad of Ken and Emily: or, Tales from the Counterculture](#)

**Abstract:** If I haven't done so yet, permit me to introduce myself now. I'm a zen phony. I learned zen on the streets. I learned yoga from a four-week yoga exercise book. I set aside an hour a day and committed myself to the pursuit of spiritual attainment through bodily awareness. I became a self-acknowledged expert in the skill of turning my body into unusual positions. The only trouble was—I hate doing things on schedule. And I couldn't convince myself that yoga was not the same as calisthenics. Then, during my burnout phase, I discovered the old zen thing and with it the secret of street yoga. This brief editorial is dedicated to all you out there in Flab Land who know you're out of shape but can't find the time to exercise.

Permit me to introduce myself. I'm a zen phony. I learned zen in the streets and I learned yoga from a four-week yoga exercise book. I set aside an hour a day and committed myself to the pursuit of spiritual attainment through bodily awareness.

I went all out to create the correct spiritual atmosphere. On the floor in the basement where I was living at the time, I laid out a shag carpet that had been handed down to me through three generations of basement dwellers, and I patched up all the leaks in all the pipes so the rain wouldn't disturb my peace of mind. I bought twenty-eight candles of various sizes and colors and burned them instead of wasting scarce natural resources. I threw all my clothes into the far corners of the room so that my body would not have to be reminded that a sexually impotent society forces it to seek cover when in public. And I burned assorted aromas of incense every day. By the end of the twenty-eight days, I was a self-acknowledged expert in the skill of turning my body into unusual positions.

The only trouble was—I hate doing things on schedule. A day only has twenty-four hours and when I'm busy I don't always have a free hour to devote to any one act, even something as noble as achieving higher levels of consciousness.

I lied. There's another thing. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't convince myself that yoga was not the same as calisthenics.

So I burned out.

I didn't do yoga for three weeks.

I didn't do calisthenics either.

Then one night, I found myself at a party in the home of two of the local street theatre dancers. One of the hostesses was serving sliced vegetables and homemade natural foods dips, and the other was pouring apple cider and white Chablis. The room was filled with weed smokers, and a small group

of folks had already drifted off into one of the bedrooms to sniff cocaine through a dollar bill. One underweight bearded fellow was sitting in the lotus position by the stereo, wearing only his undershorts and meditating between record changes, and everyone else was dancing.

I had never seen anything like it.

No, I'm not talking about the vegetables and dip. I myself was a vegetarian at the time, although I can't remember if it was because of the ecological reason or the humanitarian reason. And pot parties were the mode of the day.

But pot parties I went to were different. I went usually to two different kinds of parties, depending on which group of friends I was with. At the time, the Vietnam War was going on and The Movement was at the height of its strength. Most of my friends were politicians. We organized together, we fought together, we slept together, and we got high together. When we got high, we rapped. We were the freeks—hippies with a purpose.

Then there were the other hippies, the ones who didn't care. They slept until noon and stayed high all day. They marched for free weed if they could get it together, but that was it. After police riots or committee meetings, when I needed space to get my act back together, I hung out with them. They were usually laid out by the time I got there, so no one noticed me.

At this particular party, everyone talked, unlike the hippie parties, though not incessantly, like the freek parties. When they talked, they discussed events of artistic and literary importance. They knew the names of all the producers in Hollywood and on Broadway and they could recite all the Renaissance artists who painted portraits of the Madonna. When they walked, they moved gracefully. When they danced, they were poetry. Their every move led them spontaneously through a new and wonderful different series of positions, unlike the previous but equally as remarkable in the way they brought out the muscular definition of different parts of the body. Certain muscles were accented with each move, and yet, as I watched, I could see the entire body responding as one entity to the life force emanating from within. The harder I had tried to do yoga, the harder a time I had had doing it. They weren't even trying and they were doing it. When they sat next to me, I had to make room for the glow that surrounded them.

It was probably at that moment that I first found the words to explain the essential principle of the old zen thing: "The harder you try to do something, the harder it is to do it. As soon as you give up, you do it." I had discovered The Zen of Yoga.

Hitching home that night, I listened for the first time to the muscles in my biceps, my triceps, my wrist, and even my fingers and thumb.

The next afternoon, well rested from a deep sleep of the night before, I delivered a stirring call to action from the steps of the Capitol. Whenever I raised a clenched fist to the crowd, I lifted up on the podium from underneath with the other hand, in that way stirring my stomach muscles to action

as well.

Participation in the ensuing police riot was greatly enhanced by a newfound awareness of my groin muscles that enabled me to stretch my legs further and thus outrun the teargas fumes.

I was on my way to attaining higher consciousness through street yoga.

Street yoga is a way of life, not an hour-a-day routine. Higher consciousness is not the sole property of revolutionaries and street theatre dancers. When writers and secretaries sit at their typewriters with their feet extended outward and parallel to the ground, causing their butt and stomach muscles to tighten, they are practicing street yoga. Relax to a good situation comedy by standing yourself and your TV on your respective heads and you are practicing street yoga.

Street yoga can be practiced by business executives, housewives, computer technicians, and anyone who doesn't have the luxury of one hour every day. It can be practiced while riding the bus, bathing, or taking an elevator.

Street yoga is currently practiced by an insignificant percentage of Americans, which explains why overweight is a problem in this country.

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