

Seeing Clearly

*"Malfunctioning and strain tend to appear whenever the conscious 'I' interferes with instinctively acquired ways of proper use."
The Art of Seeing, Aldous Huxley*

When you come to yoga, it's a good idea to remove your glasses and give the eyes an opportunity to focus and re-focus for a while.

If you have difficulty with reading and close work, next time you pick up the newspaper or a book, instead of automatically reaching for your glasses, take a moment to relax and then look again.

Let go of effort, allow the muscles in your forehead and eyebrows to soften and look back at the page. Notice the white lines between the written words and run your eyes along them, without trying to read.

The words may pop out at you, or come in a 'flash' – for vision cannot be had by effort; it's either there, or it isn't. When we try to see, we always fail.

The nature of the eye is to be on the move, constantly shifting from object to object, near to far. When eyes with normal vision look at something, they imperceptibly shift many times over it, building up a picture which the brain can interpret.

But when we can't see clearly, we stare in an attempt to see better, and this makes matters worse. The eyes cease to shift and become tense.

Tension in the eyes affects the whole body. There is a direct connection between the eyes and the muscles in the back of the neck - which you can actually feel by placing your thumbs at the base of your skull and moving your eyes from side to side and up and down!

Strain in the eyes travels back to the neck, and from the neck to the back muscles, the scalp and the rest of the body.

Eyes and mind are one. The optic nerve, which originates in the brain itself, is thick; it's as if the eyes have extended out of the brain for visual information. The eyeball can literally stretch towards the world with curiosity and excitement, or withdraw inwards with depression and grief, as the optic nerve lengthens or contracts.

The eye is like a camera, whereas the mind has likes and dislikes, worries and stress. Trying too hard, wanting too much, anger, boredom and haste are all felt in the eyes.

When we are lost in thought, preoccupied, 'unseeing', the eyes become disengaged from the mind and tend to strain. The effortless movement of the eye accompanies an effortless state of being.

100 years ago, Dr. W.H. Bates, a New York ophthalmologist, found that the eye's ability to focus is continually changing, and that errors of refraction are not permanent: "...errors of refraction can be produced at will", he wrote, "and...eliminated temporarily in a few minutes and permanently by continued treatment." (*Better Eyesight without Glasses*)

Bates examined the eyes of tens of thousands of adults, children, babies and even animals with an instrument called a retinoscope, and he found "few people who could maintain perfect sight, with no refractive error, for more than a few minutes at a time."

He observed that fear and nervousness during the eye test often caused children to see worse, which could result in their being prescribed glasses for life. The problem with glasses is that they hold the eyes captive in the error of refraction they were designed to correct, so the eyesight can never improve.

Eyes which strain, stare and see blurry can be encouraged to relax, shift and 'swing' with simple (and unusual) techniques, which can be practised at odd moments, with eyes open or closed.

These remedial practices result in a marvellous sense of freshness in and around the eyes and eyebrows, and sharper vision. The health of the eyes improves, and it is not uncommon for people to feel a flooding sense of release and relief through their whole being. Some experience a remarkable improvement in their physical well-being, especially postural integration, or greater clarity of thought and memory.

Seeing is not only an act of the eyes; it involves the whole being - body, mind and soul. In learning how to see more clearly, we learn about ourselves: our hang-ups and insecurities, our narrowness of vision and need for control.

In using your eyes, do you look, or do you see? When we look, we look with a motive; we zone in on what we want or need. We look for something we've lost; we go shopping and look for something to eat.

But when we see, we have nothing to gain. We see the whole - the periphery as well as the objects straight ahead. It's just there, in all its beauty or ugliness. When we see, we see the whole world, as it really is.

Then the eyes are naturally engaged with the mind, and the mind is not resisting but flowing with the ebb and flow of life.

"In oneself lies the whole world, and if you know how to look and learn, then the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody on earth can give you either the key or the door to open, except yourself."

J. Krishnamurti

