



By MARIA SONIA G. ASTUDILLO, RYT

THE YOGINI

THERE is a yogini (female) and a yogi (male but can be both male and female) in all of us.

What is a yogi and what is a yogini? A quick search on the Net will give you: master yoga practitioner, modern spiritual teacher, someone who practices and teaches yoga. But more than being a teacher, yogis or yoginis are students, too. They have devoted their lives, or at least part of them, to the continuous study of yoga.

For a yogini, more than being a spiritual female teacher and student, it represents divine goddess, the feminine power or the enlightened mother. She may be an ordinary human exuding passion and compassion, spiritual powers and deep insight. She may be a teacher, a healer, a friend, or a mother whose mere presence radiates a strong feminine energy.

This feminine energy is never restricted to female though. As there is a yin to every yang, there is a yang to every yin. A male, to be completely balanced, must nurture his feminine and masculine powers, feelings or emotions. The same goes for female.

Think of those days when you were in the middle of a crisis—a break-up, a loss, in-between jobs—when suddenly there is that strong energy within you,

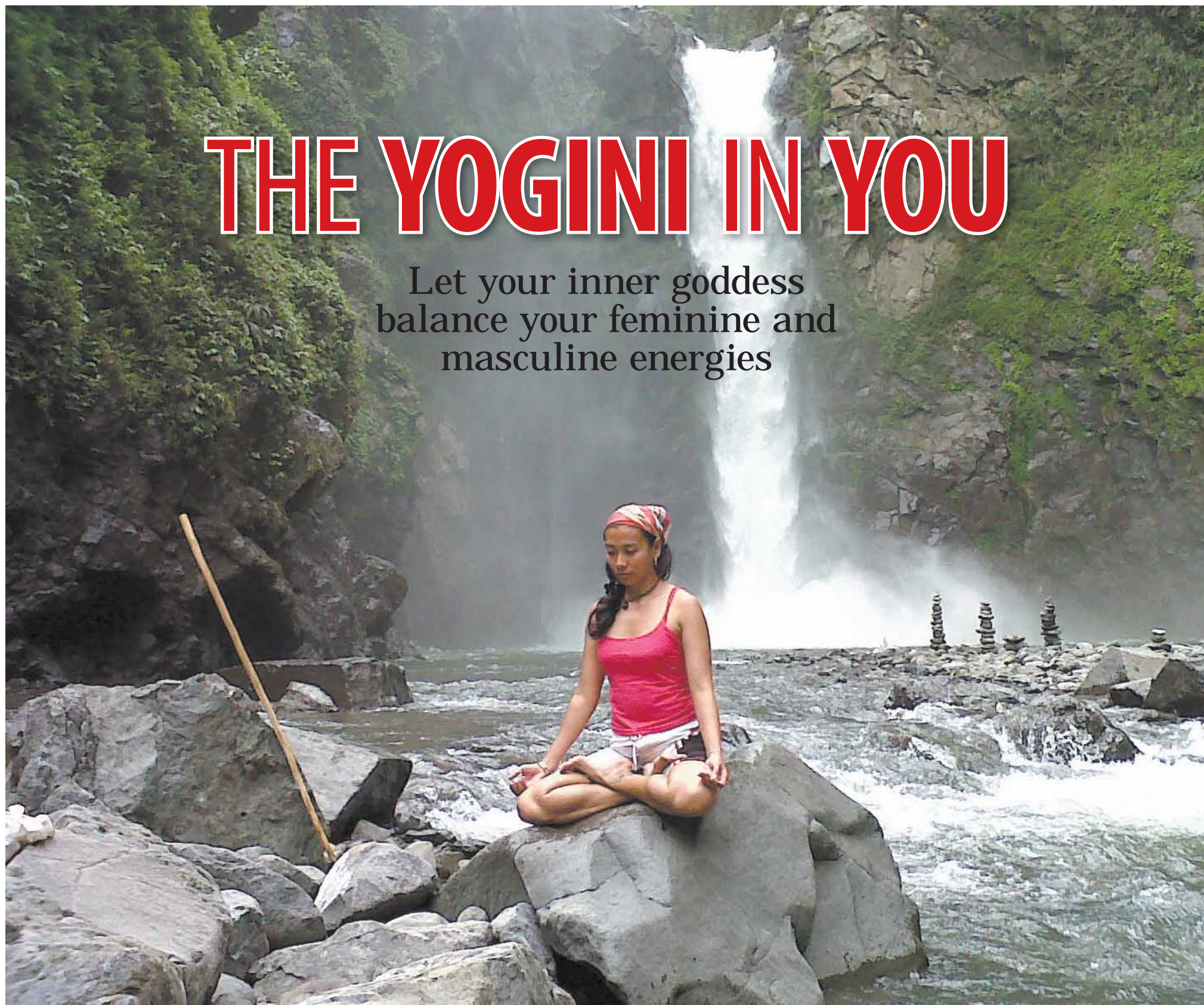
a nurturing energy that did not push but guided you to move forward. That is the feminine energy awakened. Days when you feel bored with your daily routine and suddenly you see the beauty in what you are doing. Those times when you realize you are where you actually need to be and that what you are doing and what you have in your plate are among your first loves.

Yoga 101

My journey to yoga started in 2005. At that time, I was working for a magazine when I was tasked to interview a celebrity supporter of the animal rights group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). This celebrity advocated for the just treatment of animals and the just treatment of our body and soul through yoga. From then

THE YOGINI IN YOU

Let your inner goddess
balance your feminine and
masculine energies



on, I started borrowing books on yoga, I bought DVDs and for several years, self-practiced at home. Later, I attended classes which eventually led to training to be a yoga teacher.

Does yoga awaken your feminine energy? What if you'd rather have your masculine energy be awakened?

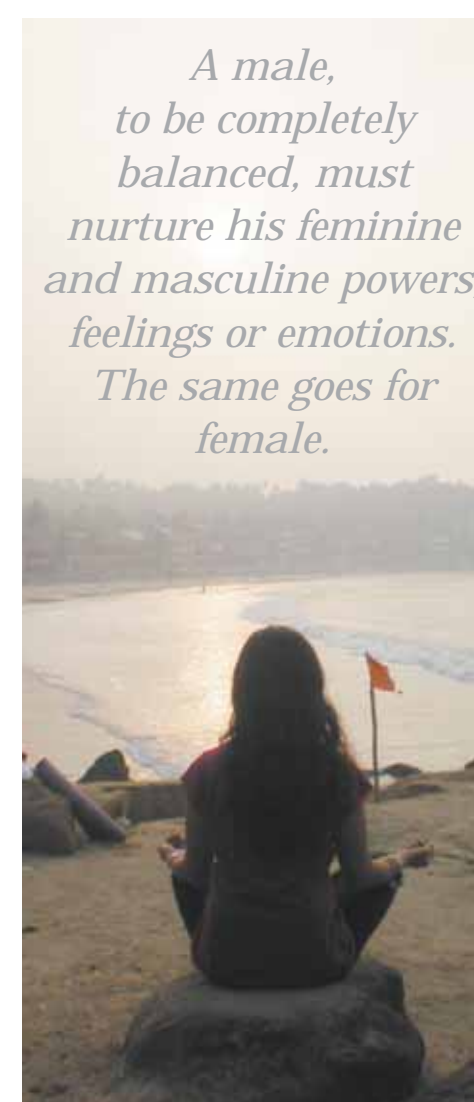
All I can say is, yoga helps you find the balance of both energies. It is not just a physical exercise. It is a lifestyle and a way of living. It is a combination of physical, mental and spiritual discipline used to attain salvation or union of the body, mind and spirit. It originated in India and found in different religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. But nowadays, you see yoga practitioners around the world. People have created their own definition and interpretation of this ancient practice.

At Sivananda yoga, a form of yoga based on the teachings of Swami Sivananda, the emphasis are on the five points of yoga: proper exercise (asanas), proper breathing (pranayama), proper relaxation (savasana), proper diet (which ideally is vegetarian), and positive thinking and meditation (vedanta and dhyana). It is not just one but all these combined to be truly in the path.

Union and balance through breathing

The second of the five points and the one that will not require you to set

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aside practice time (for the busy people) is proper breathing. By learning how to control the breathing, you control the mind. When you control the mind, there is balance and union of the body, mind and spirit. A balance of the feminine and masculine energy.

When was the last time you checked your breathing? Now that we're talking about breathing, does it seem quite unnatural to breathe? Something so natural feels unnatural. Nonetheless, conscious breathing is important. In everything we do, we always need to be aware of how we are doing it.

Unfortunately a lot of people do not breathe properly. Some do not use the maximum capacity of their lungs when breathing. When our breathing is shallow with the ribcage hardly expanding, we feel that we often tire easily. Proper breathing which should be deep, slow and rhythmical increases our energy and mental clarity.

So how do you breathe? Does your stomach expand when you inhale or does it contract?

Let us look at the 3 types of breathing and how its combination will lead us to the full yogic breathing.

First is the clavicular breathing which is the shallowest. The abdomen contracts during inhalation and the shoulders and collarbone tensed. Second is thoracic breathing, which expands just the rib cage. Third is the deep abdominal breathing which brings air to the lowest part of the lungs. Although deep abdominal breathing is the best among the three, it is not yet complete.

Combine the three and we get full yogic breathing. The stomach expands with each inhalation. Pulling in energy and filling the lungs to the maximum then inhalation continuous through the intercostal and clavicular areas. With exhalation, the stomach contracts to expel stale air in the lungs.

For starters, place your hand on your abdomen and feel the movements as you inhale and exhale. Again, stomach expands when you inhale and contracts when you exhale. This is abdominal breathing. Once you get used to it, you're ready to move on to full yogic breathing. Now, place one hand on the abdomen and the other on your chest. When you inhale, feel the abdomen, the rib cage and then the upper portion of the lungs expand and then feel the contraction as you exhale.

Good practice

A good practice while walking is to inhale for 4 counts or 4 steps and then exhale for 4 counts or steps. This will slow down the breath and after minutes of walking, you will realize you are not as tired as you normally are while walking. Later you may increase the counts to 5 then eventually to 10 or even longer.

The beauty of proper and conscious breathing doesn't stop with calming your body. Proper breathing is also very calming to the mind. Practice and guaranteed you will get results within seconds. Make it a regular part of your life. Later you may find that you're thinking clearly, your decision-making skill has improved and answers which

seemed too elusive before are suddenly right before your eyes. Then you realize that all the while, things were simple, your mind and your breathing were just too agitated that you weren't thinking clearly.

Let your breathing awaken and balance the energies running through you. Feel both the feminine and masculine energy within. Now that you found yoga through breathing, we're on a roll for the other points of yoga. Allow yoga to find you. Who knows, years from now, you'd say I completely relate to you when I say, I am happiest when practicing and teaching yoga. ☺

Sonia (spiritual name: Savithri) is a Sivananda-trained teacher who completed her course in February 2011 from the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram in Kerala, South India. She is registered with Yoga Alliance as a 200-hour level yoga teacher or RYT @ 200. She is a reiki practitioner since 2007 and is attuned to the 2nd degree of the traditional Usui lineage by Reiki Master Nina Manalang. She has organized and attended several health and healing workshops on Chinese Integrative Medicine, tuina massage and hands-on acupressure. She also practices Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga. Vegetarian since 2005, she is an avid believer of regular food detox program and is always willing to share her detox stories. Yoga, for her, is the experience of being firmly grounded to the earth yet connected to the divine world; a way of living that is peaceful, mindful, dispassionate and non-attached to mundane concerns. Aside from teaching yoga, Sonia works as the Communications and Press Campaigner for environmental health NGO, Health Care Without Harm-Asia Pacific.

