

WORDS: SHELDON GRANT LEON

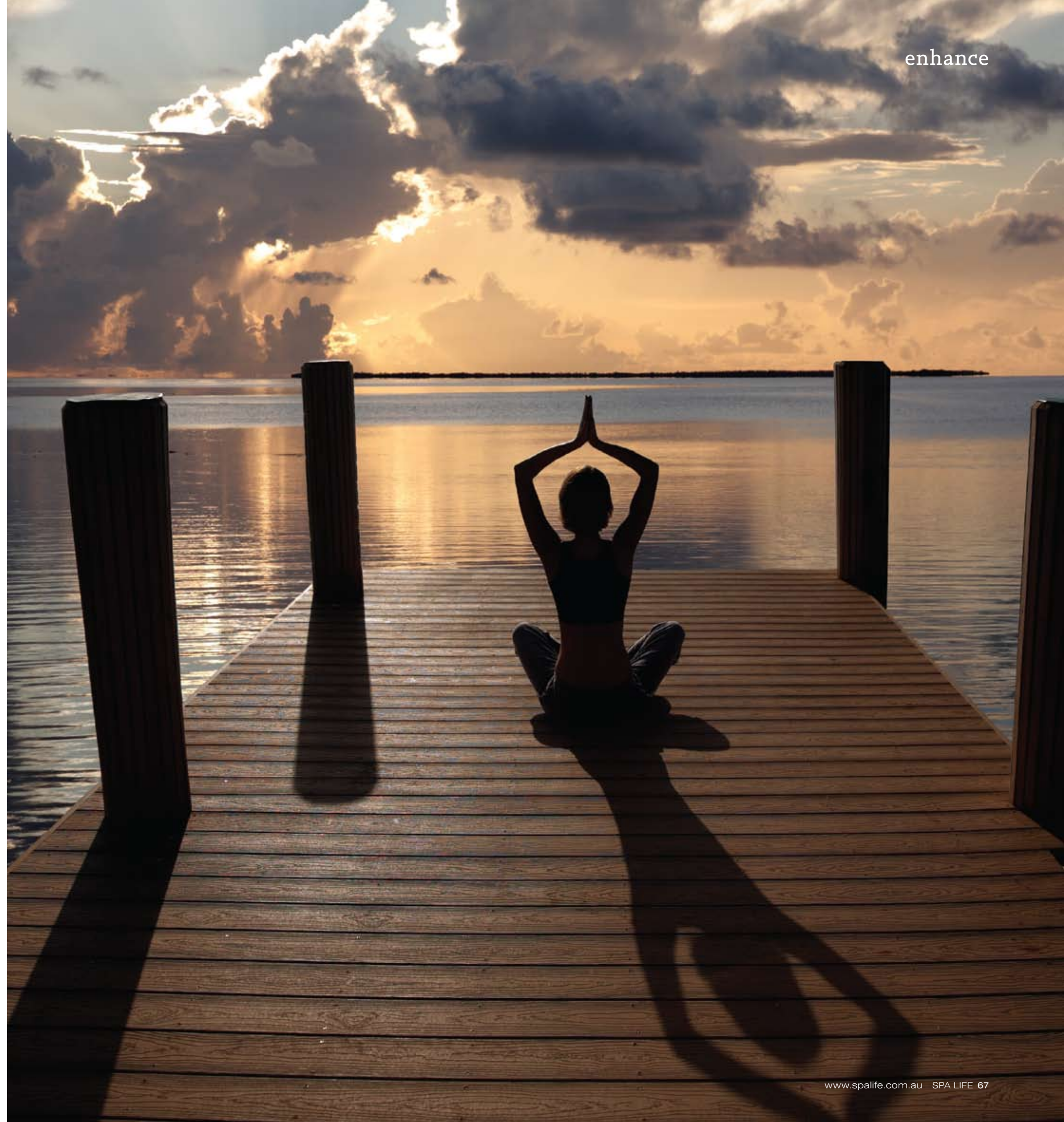
8 qualities of exceptional yoga teachers

the *real* deal...

Sheldon Grant Leon is founder and director of Joyous Journey (Designing Excellence in Wholistic Wellness). Sheldon runs classes, workshops and retreats worldwide for small groups incorporating yoga, meditation, tai chi, qi gong, nutritional education and life coaching. All classes are done in a fun and safe environment at exceptional, quality locations around the globe, where hearts open and spirits fly. Sheldon's background is in diverse fields: yoga and meditation instructor, nutritional lecturer and speaker, naturopath, kinesiologist, gymnast and dancer, as well as tai chi and qi gong teacher.

Much is written and discussed about physical and logical structures of doing yoga, and properly educating people about its principles and foundational elements, for it is hugely important to do yoga safely, correctly and diligently. Within all these very serious manners of teaching and practicing, there are some things that can turn a yoga class or session into an incredible experience of self-discovery, with a unification of many varied parts into total wholeness. These experiences create massive change for the student and teacher alike. These are words of wisdom...

Here are my eight little gems I wear proudly around my neck and continually share with others. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do. >





1. Care for others

If you take the focus off yourself, you see yourself in a new light and a new reality builds - the reality that we are all one and that this time called 'life' was meant to be shared. We all need each other. Caring is not so much what you say, but what you do in your thoughts and actions when no one is looking and no one can hear your voice. It does not need or want praise or gratitude.

2. Understand the human body's anatomy and physiology

By exploring your own strengths and weaknesses, and through a love and desire to keep learning more and more, you transcend your own limitations of what you are and who you will become. By doing this, bravery and courage slowly but surely seep in and permeate into your veins and arteries, mind and soul, dharma and destiny. Every thought, every cell, becomes charged with vital force and energy.

3. Profound love to teach and serve

This usually comes naturally. As your students feel and understand intuitively what you are all about, they keep coming back. Without advertising on mass media, they know how special you are. You receive an incredible wave of humility and grace. As it fills you as a teacher, you fill them with a genuine vision of what they are becoming. They are becoming yogis (male) or yoginis (female) in their own right. In their lives, beautiful change is consciously and unconsciously manifesting day by day, moment by moment, without judgement. Serendipity happens! Everyone feels good. Understanding that life is not static, but constantly moving, changing, growing, evolving. Joy becomes real. Even in the smallest of things and quietest of moments.

4. Run and lead the yoga class exclusively for your students, not for your own workout

Again, it is about service to others. As the great teachers have said throughout the ages, the more you give, the more you have to give. You will not get tired or fatigued, as your passion will feed itself anew with light and love. By being aware of this sacred energy, this energy becomes a part of you. Flowing, glowing creativity beams out throughout the class. Like a warming, comforting and enlightening fire, the class feels safe and calmly energised. Everyone feels so alive.

5. Be a positive and eloquent communicator and speaker

Know the nuances of rhythm and tone and how they affect emotion and desire. And be very serious about your responsibility to correctly teach the art and science of yoga. All these ideas and concepts are constantly balanced with letting people have the freedom and space to feel joy, laughter, grace and creativity. We are all a kaleidoscope of everything, light and dark, soft and hard, serious and playful. Know how to orchestrate this energetic dance within the hues and notes of time and space. This is the unique and truly powerful transformational element of a yoga class. The teacher/guru paints a picture of harmony and respect for all to join in, for all to participate equally at their own level. For all who want to travel the path.

6. Love of performance and excellence

Make no mistake, as a teacher you are performing on a very high level for all to see, feel and experience. The long and rich history of yoga goes back thousands of years. This epic and personal storytelling breeds excellence in the teacher and student alike. Instead of watching others live fascinating lives, we become the actors and dancers of our own masterpiece. It has been recorded again and again in the long, continual cycle of yogis unfolding and passing on these introductory principles and elements of body, mind, spirit and soul.

Bring new and old students back into the wonderful world of practical and creative transformational yoga. For the forever passionate teacher, it is an awesome burden, but also a great freedom. We in the profession do what we know. Not just from our books or teachers, but from our hearts and intuition. Our souls longing to see truth and honesty in every step, movement, sound and breath, in every person. It is just what we do. Again, those around us just get it, without words or explanation. We don't just talk the talk. We walk the talk and others join in to do the same. Yogis and yoginis have always been visionaries for people and societies to respect throughout the ages. Instead of using paint as a painter creates great works of art, we use thoughts, focus, body awareness and breath to build our masterpiece in our time, in our space, in this moment.

7. Correct, align and balance body structure

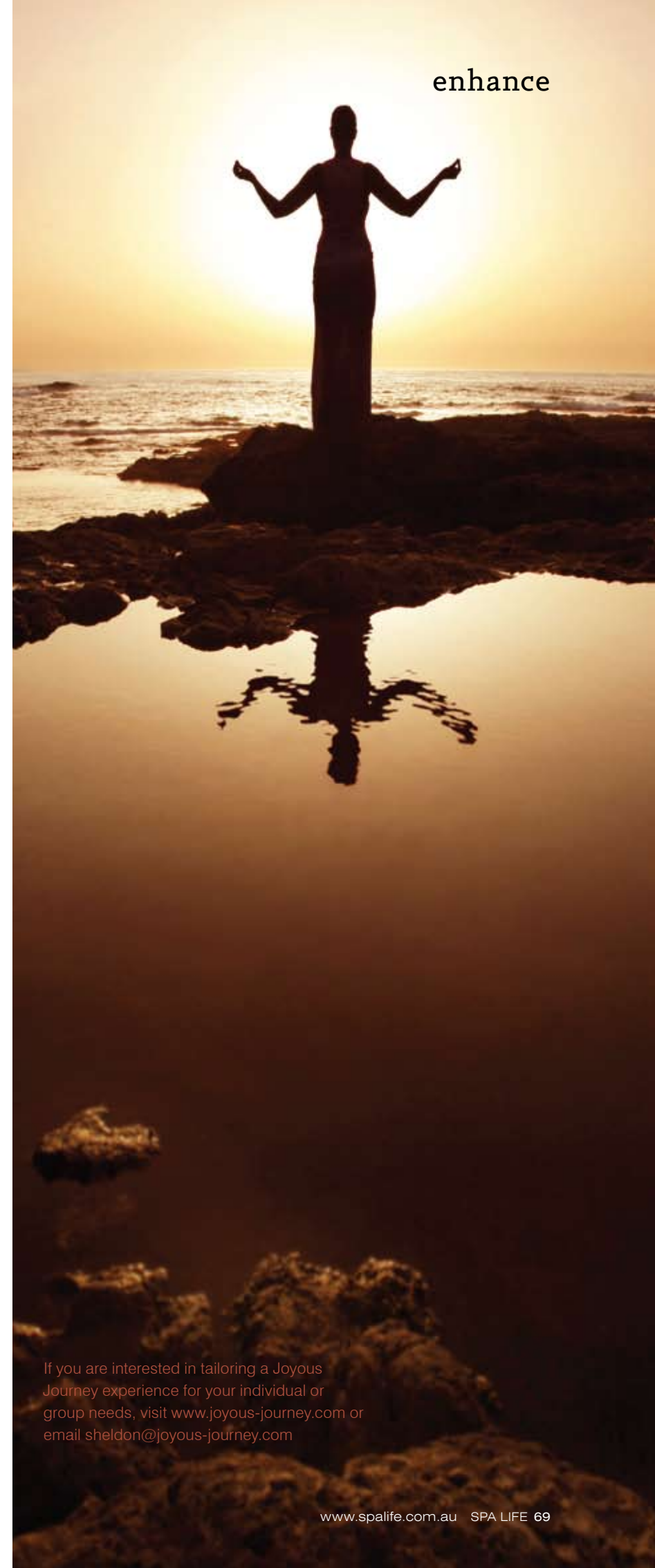
Another powerful tool we use is our ability to look at our students, at a glance, and immediately correct, align and balance the body structure of the many different individuals in one class. See and build the whole energy system and posture coming together, creating immediate change. Over time, even the subtle, quiet variations of breath are detected and aligned at once.

An example of this common and simple body alignment/balance is feeling equal and opposite energy lines, running up and down your spine while sitting cross-legged (sukasana). Pressing down through the sitting bones underneath your hips, like a tree penetrating the ground into Mother Earth. This creates foundation and total support (muladhara chakra). At the same time, with the same breath lifting up through the crown of the head to the heavens (Samadhi) from the waistline up, feeling the soaring upward energy, to create space between the vertebrae. So prana (life force) can flow up and down the whole spine. Again, you feel grounded into the earth, very supported, but flying laterally up from the waist to the sky, out through the crown of the head. Then the jaw is totally relaxed and dropping down. The lips are soft and slightly open. The tongue lets go and falls forward. The cheeks in the face let go and relax softly. The eyeballs descend into their sockets and the forehead lets go of all tension and stress. You even let yourself relax and feel your scalp with every hair follicle on your head opening and closing with each and every breath. Your whole head feels like a helium balloon. The lightest of being! What joy.

8. The final principle and element of a good yoga teacher, as well as a student, is to understand that good and beneficial things take time

Rome was not built in a day, so don't force change. It will happen organically. Everything in nature has its time and season. Move gracefully in your body over space, being aware and alert of everything you do, without stress, without the past which you have left behind, and without the future which is yet to come. Be in the moment now, unlike going to the gym, where you can put on your headphones and be oblivious to what your body and mind are really doing. In yoga, we move together over time in grounded space. Aware of every little thing we do. Of every little movement we make. By training our body and mind in this manner, we become the masters of our own destiny, the creators of our dreams and the vehicle for our own success. This roadmap is time honoured and tested for the young at heart and courageous in spirit. The definition of yoga: conscious union! It is our birthright.

Namaste! *



If you are interested in tailoring a Joyous Journey experience for your individual or group needs, visit www.joyous-journey.com or email sheldon@joyous-journey.com