

spirituality in **action**

## Street Yoga

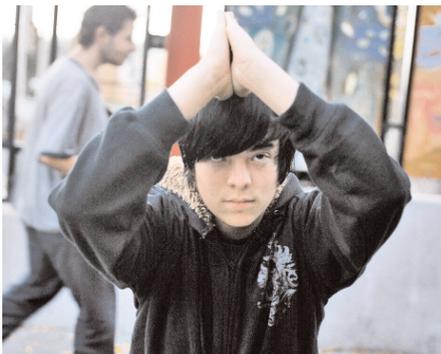
Many people turn to yoga to relieve stress, but it's hard to imagine a group under more stress than homeless youth. Day-to-day survival is a struggle for the estimated millions of young people without a home in the US, who are vulnerable to sexual abuse, drugs, and street violence. Mark Lilly, a former software engineer, started Street Yoga in 2002 to provide homeless youth with "accessible, non-threatening environments in which to take off their backpacks and experience strength and stillness in both body and mind."

The Portland-based organization has free yoga, meditation, and wellness classes tailored to the emotional and physical rigors of living on the streets. Classes often start with asanas to address chronic back pain from nights spent on park benches, under bridges, and on floors. Other poses build heat in the body to counteract exposure from cold and rain. Modifications are given for persistent injuries from child abuse.

Students report benefits ranging from reduced soreness to resolving fights with friends. As one girl commented after a class, "Today I'm so relaxed I feel spoiled."

Street Yoga offers 2 1/2-day trainings for volunteers, with sessions on conflict prevention, yoga for special populations, and how to design your own local program. Upcoming events include a training in Ontario, Canada on September 19-21, and a workshop at Omega Institute's Being Yoga Conference in New York City on October 10-13. [www.streetyoga.org](http://www.streetyoga.org)

—Katherine Jamieson



simple **pleasure**

## Stargazing

Take yourself out to a field some evening after everyone else is asleep. Listen to the migrant birds whisking past in the dark; listen to the creaking and settling of the world.

Think about the teeming, microscopic worlds beneath your shoes—the continents of soil, the galaxies of bacteria. Then lift your face up.

The night sky is the coolest Advent calendar imaginable: it is composed of an infinite number of doors. Open one and find ten thousand galaxies hiding behind it, streaming away at hundreds of miles per second. Open another, and another. You gaze up into history; you stare into the limits of your own understanding. The past flies toward you at the speed of light. Why are you here? Why are the stars there? Is it even remotely possible that our one, tiny, eggshell world is the only one encrusted with life?

"To sense that behind anything that can be experienced," Einstein once said, "there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness."

Whatever we believe in—God, children, nationhood—nothing can be more important than to take a moment every now and then and accept the invitation of the sky: to leave the confines of ourselves and fly off into the hugeness of the universe, to disappear into the inexplicable, the implacable, the reflection of that something our minds cannot grasp.

—Anthony Doerr

*Anthony Doerr is the author, most recently, of Four Seasons in Rome. This piece first appeared in the July/August 2007 issue of Orion magazine.*

living **green**

## Halting the Spread of "ROADSIDE DAISIES"

### UBIQUITOUS FLIMSY PLASTIC BAGS

littering roadsides or stuck in trees were jokingly dubbed its "national flower" until South Africa banned the flimsies five years ago. Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda followed suit, and in Asia, Taiwan and Bangladesh.

In the absence of national leadership in the U.S., San Francisco banned the bags last year, and other cities may follow. A tiny vanguard of green shoppers voluntarily reuse cloth bags.

Now China—hardly short on central planning—means to curb its three billion bag-a-day habit by outlawing the flimsy free bags; customers must pay for heavy, reusable ones. Though Chairman Mao said, "Let a hundred flowers bloom," it's not likely he'd tolerate those "roadside daisies." Why should we? —Mollie Ann Smith

