

# Core Integration with Jill Miller

Lulu Bandhas, Ojai, January 17, 2004

BY ADAM SKOLNICK

I'm here for Core Integration and feel like I'm falling into a thousand pieces. Clutching my orange sticky mat I hurtle into Lulu Bandhas, located in the emphatically green Ojai Valley, seconds before class and have no idea what I'm in for. Is this the beginning of a clearly needed integration of mind, body and soul or some hackneyed, quasi-yoga step on the eternal quest for Jesus abs?

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would be invigorated by the coming exercises. The sequence is restorative, and while there is some intensity, my abdomen relaxes, and I almost doze off.

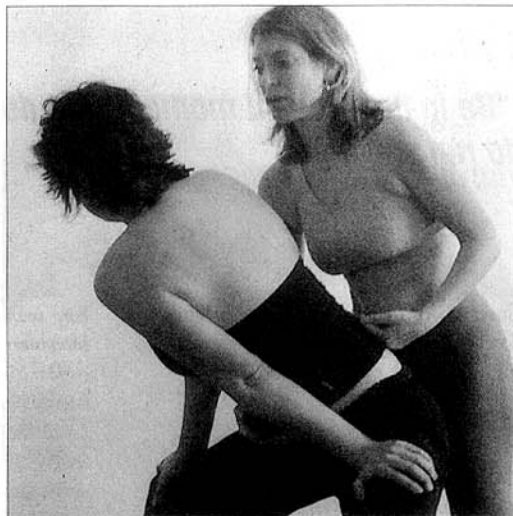
Then she explains that the core is also the seat of *agni* or digestive fire critical to health and longevity, and that the upcoming "contractive exercises" will spark the blaze. She also acknowledges that we may feel "different levels of sensation" – her term for pain – during the sequences. Another red flag. I brace myself for the searing abdominal crunch.

We hold our legs straight up, pinning a quartered blanket between the thighs, and lift our heads to knees. The sweat pours. Remaining on our backs, we bring our knees to chest and drive them into the palms, while we push back with outstretched arms. My

The lovely Jill Miller, 32, has an anchorwoman face and a taut body, and regards her curious class with a smile. Miller explains, "We will be processing subtle energies of the core. If you're overwhelmed by the process just lay back and breathe." This disclaimer assures me of one thing. There will be pain.

The workshop begins slowly. We place a rolled towel at three abdominal points, and

lay on top of it for several minutes to stimulate and loosen the muscles from the pelvis to the ribs, including the psoas, obliques and transverse abdominus. "This is the first layer of armor, and it must release so we can go deeper," she says. She discusses the third *chakra*, which governs our abdominal muscles and organs, including the spleen, pancreas, liver, stomach and intestines, and represents our strength of will – all of which



Jill Miller assists student



Students work with folded blankets between thighs in an abdominal crunch. Photos: Adam Skolnick

body trembles with pressure and energy. "As yogis we don't like to push," she offers, "but we need a certain amount of tension so we can connect to our innerforce."

Miller devotes most of class to an abdominal *bandha* or lock as one key to strengthening weak muscles, stretching scar tissue, awakening sluggish organs, and otherwise integrating the core. We empty the lungs completely, until a deep cavity forms from the ribs to the pelvis, and practice holding the breath in and out, before applying this *bandha* in down dog, runners lunge, and *tadasana* (mountain pose).

The lock is fundamental to Core Integration, because it accesses what Miller calls the "belly-brain" in any posture. "Core Integration uses the breath to wake up whatever's dormant [in the

belly]. You may witness colors, images, and memories. These are messages. Yoga teaches us that there is intelligence in the body. For instance, cells in the small intestine produce hormones like serotonin and dopamine that affect brain function." Over time this practice makes abdominal muscles and organs, and the mind, both strong and flexible enabling students to better live their truth.

Although the *bandhas* are challenging, the discomfort is ephemeral and once the exercises are complete, a deep relaxation takes hold. During *savasana* my belly-brain delivers its message. I'm not in fact falling to pieces, and a little pain can be a good thing.

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