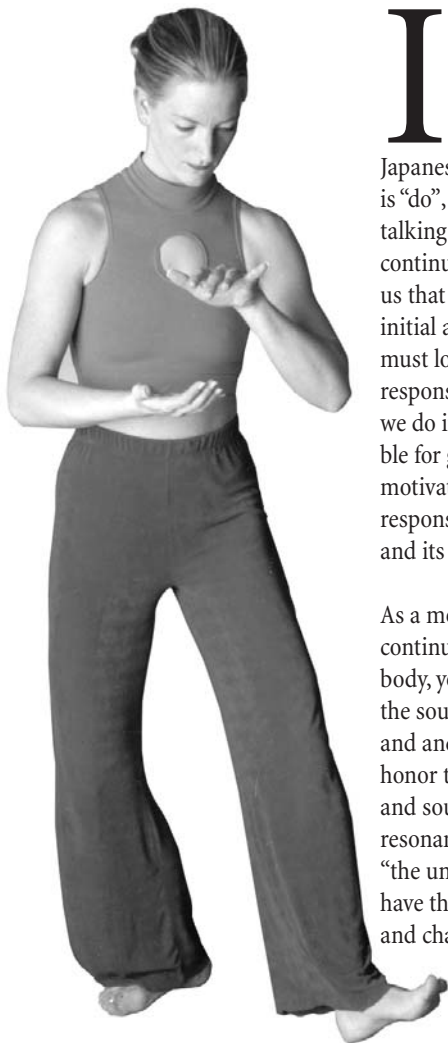


The “Do of Nia”

HOW TO BEGIN AND GROW AS A STUDENT OF NIA AND REAP REWARDS!



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In the martial arts, there is a word, budo that means “the martial way.” In life, there is a word, Nia that means “movement with purpose.” The Japanese term for path, or way of life, is “do”, a good descriptive term when talking about beginning to study and continuing to practice Nia. It reminds us that Nia is a path and that to reap initial and continued rewards, we must look, listen, sense, and take responsibility for what we do and how we do it. As teachers, we are responsible for guiding, educating, and motivating. As students, you are responsible for addressing your body and its needs in the moment.

As a movement practice, Nia can continue to help transform you, your body, your work, and your life because the soul of Nia is alive. Both modern and ancient, Nia teaches you how to honor the body of humanity. The feel and sound of Nia carries a healing resonance that speaks to what we call “the universal body.” The body we all have that has the potential to self-heal and change in amazing ways.

As a lifestyle practice, Nia carries the heart of goodness, love, and peace within. As a form with structure, Nia's foundation and craft is flexible and is founded in both scientific and spiritual wisdom. By practicing Nia's mindful and conscious movement, self-knowing, personal understanding, transforma-

tion, fitness, and health happen. Over the years while personally growing with Nia, we are reminded that what we get out of Nia has a lot to do with what we put into it.

In the beginning, as a new student, it is possible that your body is less open, less flexible, and less able to move with dynamic ease (without effort). If this is the case, you probably rely on more gross and linear body movements to get the Nia sweat, the whole body feel, the workout, and the dancing high. As your body heals, it will relax, realign, and open up making it easier to move gracefully and with ease. The lesson; as muscles relax and balance, and as joints open up, every part of the body works in an integrated way. This allows you to move as a whole person in a dynamic way that feels easy. Until then, whether you are a beginner or seasoned student, get the aerobic sweat, the physical high, and the exhilaration and joy by making a connection to comfortable sensations in your physical body. Here's how:

1 Be of the beginner's mind. The amount of energy unleashed when we approach something for the first time is huge. Beginner's mind seduces all parts of us to show up for the experience where the results are a greater return for the effort put in. Approach everything you do as if it is new. Be fully in the moment to improve body awareness

and reap the physical benefits associated with all parts of your body becoming involved in the experience. You'll be amazed at the continued changes you'll see and feel.

2 Grow into dynamic ease. Start out with small moves and develop them into bigger ones. Allow your body the time and space it needs to sense how to relate to the movements on a moment to moment basis. Start out small and grow into potential by allowing your body the permission and freedom to start everything small. As your moves get bigger, adjust the distance between your feet and between the highs and lows to maintain open and free joints. This is what supports you in moving in dynamic ease while at the same time daily fitting Nia into your body's parameters. Moving from small to big and back into small out of big increases flexibility and strength.

3 Find the beat, the rhythm. Enter into the Nia dance by connecting first to your feet and legs. This is the part of you that is the foundation for the whole body. It is the part that connects you to the rhythm and beat. Even if you can't find, feel, or hear the beat, it is there. When movement has a foundation, it delivers all kinds of conditioning. Use your feet and legs to get into the move and to mark and sense the beats.

4 Add parts slowly. Once you feel your feet and legs dynamically involved, begin to add other body parts such as the arms. Add on parts only if you can maintain a connection to the base, and be sure to stay dynamically connected to your legs when using the arms. Use the upper body energetically only after you have established a solid and powerful base. This will keep the heart rate up, the passion alive, and the results coming. If each movement is balanced, you'll find dynamic ease.

(Continued on reverse)

5 Let go and dance. To experience individual creativity and free expression interpret every move on your own to create movement variety. See the move, mimic it, and then go inside and ask your body to interpret and reframe the move so you feel more of you, more of your body, and more of your spirit. Movement variety is your answer to receiving constant results from Nia. From time to time consciously guide your body to move in exactly the same way as your teacher, as this may be a new way for you to move.

6 Ask for guidance. We are all students and teachers. If you are not getting what you want out of Nia, ask for help. Approach your teacher and express what you would like to achieve, or go to the Nia website www.nia-nia.com. Log on and go into the Students' Forum. This is where you can write and ask for help from hundreds of Nia teachers, including Debbie and Carlos. Communicating is one of the best ways to get what you want.

7 Focus and learn. Remember to use these basic Nia tools for supporting continued growth and physical change:

- Use all parts of your body as free-weights. Nia movement is generated by shifting body weight, by moving as a whole, and by isolating parts such as your head, chest, and pelvis. Cardiovascular fitness is supported by you rising higher or sinking lower into gravity while respecting your joints. Minimize effort by adjusting how you use your body parts. Increase the physically dynamic quality by using body parts to intensify Nia.

- Use your feet as the foundation. Keep body weight evenly distributed across either the ball of the foot, or over the entire surface in contact with the floor. An even spread keeps movements safe and efficient. Leading with the heel when you step to the front or to the side opens

joints and conditions legs while protecting the tiny metatarsal bones in the feet. When stepping back, step onto the ball of your foot and keep your knees soft to protect your back. Gain stability, balance, muscle flexibility and strength by using your feet.

- Use breath and make sounds to stimulate the core. Let go with hearty sounds: “stop,” “no,” “hai,” “yeet,” or your own creative sound to support cardiovascular conditioning by using sound energy. The more “umph” you put in the sound, the more you tone your abdominal muscles.

- Work on various planes and through many ranges of motion as you shift into higher or lower planes. Movement variety ensures that no one part of your body gets over used. As you move in and out of levels, you build strength and flexibility.

- Consciously change the energy dynamic of your movement. Sometimes think fluid and lyrical while other times direct your energy to move forcefully, or in a circular or linear way. Changing energy dynamics works muscles differently and sharpens neuromuscular reactions.

A L W A Y S

- Pay attention to “what you do” and “how you do it.”

- Listen to your body. Even the smallest sign of discomfort means you are out of alignment.

- Avoid the “fitness warrior” attitude. If you’re an athlete, your endurance may be greater than your flexibility, and your strength may be muscle specific. Nia is comprehensive and systemic. Ease into the movement as if you were new to exercise.

- Connect to your feet as the base and foundation. Bare foot or not, Nia movements are designed to protect

your feet and to take advantage of the vital clues they send to you when your body is out of alignment or off-balance. These clues help you avoid injury. Without shoes, you can strengthen feet and ankles, increase circulation, flexibility, dexterity, and decrease cramping and calluses. Do wear shoes if you have structural foot problems or feel more comfortable. If you are going to wear shoes, we suggest a soft-soled shoe.

- Make each workout for you. You’ll achieve with Nia if you give yourself the gift of patience to gradually become stronger progressively gaining flexibility, stamina, strength, relaxation, and balance class after class.

- Increase the intensity of your workout gradually. Sense when it is the right time to sink a bit deeper, rise a bit higher, reach a bit further. Allow your body to assimilate changes slowly and smoothly, and seek new and pleasurable sensations by moving in subtle and different ways.

- Go for movement variety. Alternate between easier and more challenging workouts regardless of the speed or beat. Sometimes, use more parts of your body in dynamic ways by covering the space more fully, and other times focus on the subtleties of each motion by keeping your arms, hands, and legs closer to the center, to the core of your body.

T O L I G H T E N N I A

- Keep movements close to your body. Make arm motions smaller and lift feet less. Maintain balance and a comfortable flow. Move as if you were ballroom dancing. Ease up on arm motions by letting them move comfortably allowing your legs and torso to maintain the rhythm.

- Sink and rise less by using your feet, softening your knees, and moving your hips slightly.

T O L O A D N I A

- Make movements broader and wider, yet comfortable and balanced.

- Sink deeper, rise higher, reach further, and use more of your body in more dynamic and physical ways.

- Use all of you and pay attention to the joints as a way to access detailed movement. Move your arms, the shoulder blades, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and even your fingers. You’ll be amazed at how much arm definition you get by wiggling fingers and rolling wrists. This simple action even raises your heart rate.

- Fully express the energy dynamics of each movement by varying them from hard to soft, linear to circular, fluid to rhythmic, calm to agitated, etc. Movement variety keeps you dynamically involved.



M I N D • B O D Y • S O U L

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