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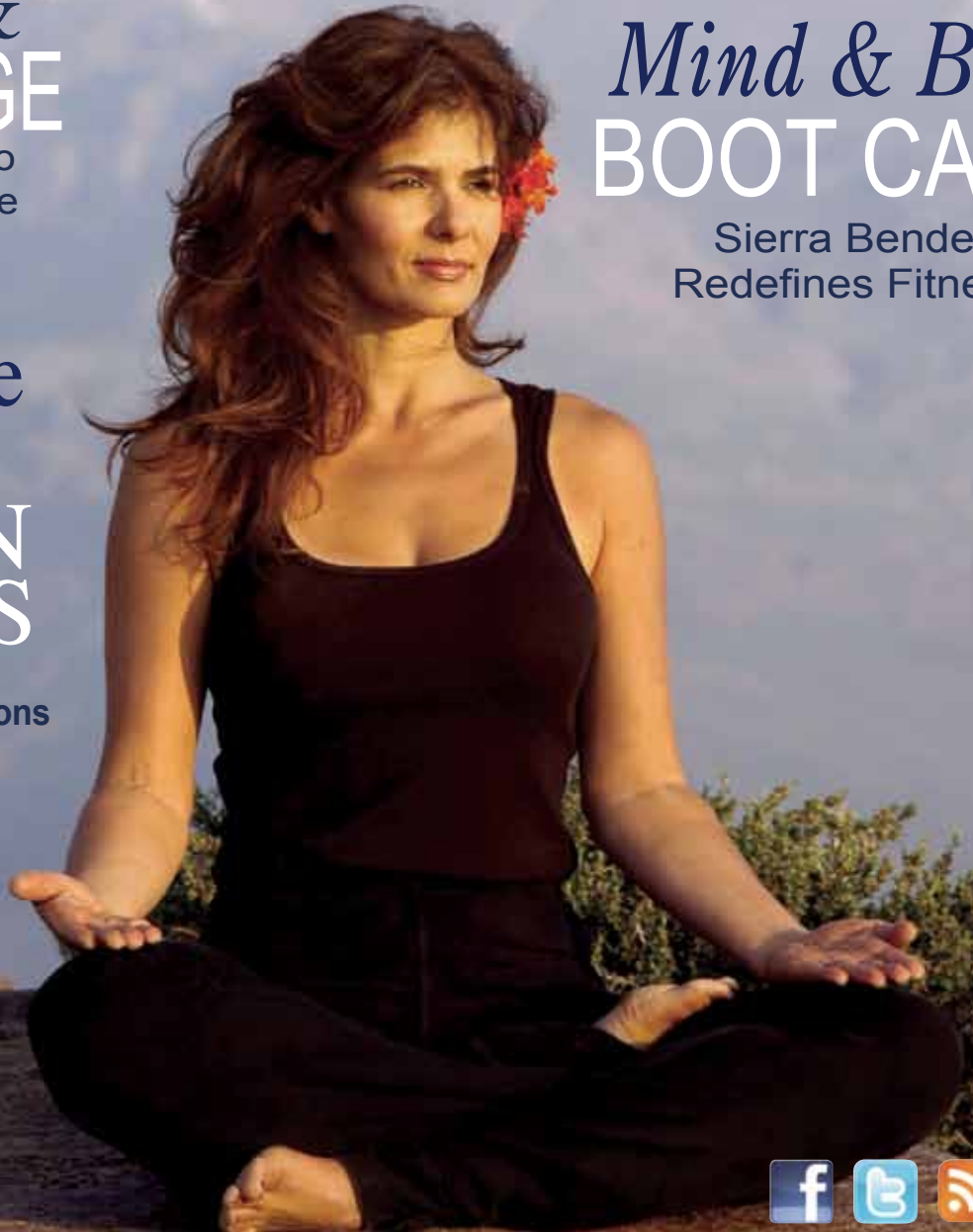
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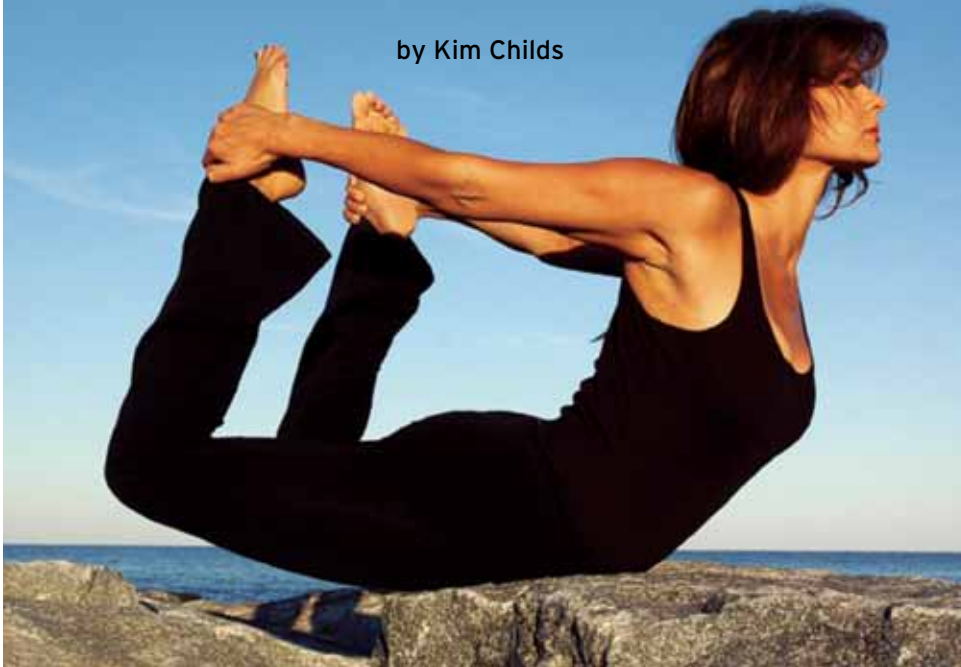


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# SIERRA BENDER'S HOLISTIC BOOT CAMP

REDEFINING FITNESS TO EMPOWER WOMEN  
FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

by Kim Childs



In her early 30s, Sierra Bender was a personal trainer who looked and felt physically fit. Then, one day, her body took a turn that she didn't see coming. Bender initially mistook the sensation she experienced for a pulled muscle.

"I exercised every day and worked as a professional trainer," she recalls, "but I was so out of my body that I didn't even know that my uterus had ruptured [from an ectopic pregnancy outside the womb]. That's how disconnected I was... fit on the outside, but an emotional wreck on the inside."

Today, Bender works to prevent other women from focusing solely on physical fitness and body image at the expense of their emotional, mental and even physical health. Her mission is to

redefine health for women so that they understand wellness as a whole-self process and become empowered to lead truly integrated lives.

"Empowerment involves pulling forth what's already within you," Bender says. "We've mastered the beauty part of looking fit and good, but it doesn't last, because it's not coming from the core inside. So, that's where women are searching."

## Boot Camp Intensive

After years of studying yoga, bodywork, energy healing, nutrition and shamanism, Sierra developed the Bender Empowerment Method 4 Body Fit concept that she teaches at her week-long Boot Camp for Goddesses retreats

around the country. The four bodies identified are the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of a person, all of which receive training and treatment in Bender's workshops.

Boot camp participants hike, practice yoga, learn anatomy and train with weights. They also dance, sing, cry, journal, share secrets, pray and purify themselves via Native American-style sweat lodges. The aim is to heal anything that's preventing a woman from living her full potential, says Bender, and her methods show people where they most need to work.

"One day, you'll be great at the mental exercises, but not the physical, so that shows where your weakness is," Bender explains. "Some [students] are great at doing the exercises or workouts, but they can't sit still or be quiet on a 45-minute hike; so each one is being challenged."

The first technique that Bender teaches is conscious breathing to oxygenate the body and calm the nervous system. That means breathing deeply through the nostrils, filling the lungs and always checking in with the breath during any activity. Improper breathing and stress go hand-in-hand, she says, and because the stress hormone cortisol can cause fat retention, people who discount their breath may feel frustrated when diet and exercise routines seem to fail them.

"Breath is what burns fat in the simplest form," says Bender. "What gives your body energy and vitality? Breath. What keeps you looking young and alive? Breath. Our skin is our largest organ."

## Fitness Made Easier

Kim Davis, a 45-year-old legal secretary from Houston, Texas, enrolled in one of Bender's workshops in 2008 to lose a few pounds. She says the conscious breathing enhances her workouts.

"The best thing I've taken away from the boot camp experience is that fitness does not have to be difficult—with hours spent on a treadmill or pumping iron—to be effective," says Davis. "I no longer feel I have to punish my body into fitness, but instead attain fitness through a loving relationship with my body."



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Davis, who went on to become a yoga teacher, says that she and others in Bender's workshop also experienced emotional and psychological breakthroughs through holding yoga postures and practicing breathing techniques. This led to emotional releases through tears and words, followed by more lightness in the body, Davis reports.

### Holistic Empowerment

When teaching yoga and fitness, Bender tells her students which organs, glands and body systems are being affected by each posture. The psychological and emotional relevance of poses like Cobra are also explained to students who may feel uncomfortable in such a heart-opening posture.

"Students start to understand that this posture is reflecting their weaknesses and strengths, and they may realize, 'Okay, I don't want to open my heart that big; that's too vulnerable,'" she observes.

Getting her goddesses to embrace their vulnerability, strength, inner spirit and authentic power is at the heart of Bender's work with women and female teens. She advises: "A goddess warrior trusts her intuition and is brave enough to follow it."

For more information about Sierra Bender, her recent book, Goddess to the Core: An Inspired Workout to Maximize Your Fitness, Beauty & Power, and upcoming workshops and events, visit [SierraBender.com](http://SierraBender.com).

Kim Childs teaches Kripalu yoga in the Boston area. Connect at [KimChilds.com](http://KimChilds.com).

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