



Accessible Yoga

JOURNAL 2016



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Mission Statement

Accessible Yoga is dedicated to sharing the benefits of Yoga with anyone who currently does not have access to these practices, and with communities that have been excluded or under-served. All people, regardless of ability or background, deserve equal access to the ancient practices of Yoga, which offer individual empowerment and spiritual awakening. By building a strong network and advocating for a diverse Yoga culture that is inclusive and welcoming, we are sharing Yoga with all.

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Dear Accessible Yoga Family,

Welcome to the 2nd Annual Accessible Yoga Conference in Santa Barbara, California, and this premiere issue of the Accessible Yoga Journal. This magazine, and all of our efforts, are dedicated to increasing access to the practices and teachings of yoga.

In the Journal, we have asked all the Conference presenters and panel leaders to write articles about their work so that we can share their teaching more widely. We'd also like to thank all the sponsors, who are acknowledged within these pages, for helping to support our scholarship fund. This year, we have been able to offer scholarships to the majority of people attending the Conference—because we understand that accessibility often begins with financial access.

Because of your encouragement, support, and hard work, this past year we have witnessed the transformation of Accessible Yoga from a conference in California to an international movement. At last year's Conference so many of you came forward wanting to get involved, and we now have over one hundred **Accessible Yoga Ambassadors** around the world and over fifty volunteer teammates serving on seven teams.

These teammates are organizing this Conference and our upcoming **NYC Accessible Yoga Conference** planned for May 19-21, 2017. At the closing session of the Conference we'll offer more details about our team structure and ways for you to get involved.

We're thrilled to announce a partnership with Yoga International to offer the **Accessible Yoga Online Conference**, so that we can make these offerings accessible to people who can't join us in person. Through this online collaboration, we can expand our reach around the world, and connect with a growing movement of yogis who are dedicated to inclusivity.

We're also excited to announce the launch of the **Accessible Yoga Network**, an online directory of yoga teachers and organizations dedicated to increasing access to yoga. Details will be announced at the Conference.

Our teams are participating in two annual **Accessible Yoga Celebrations**: December 3, the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities; and June 21, the government of India's International Day of Yoga. These celebrations offer yet another avenue for increased awareness and advocacy.

In this coming year, we're expanding our **Accessible Yoga Training** programs by offering them throughout California, as well as in NYC, Virginia, Greece, Portugal, Italy, France, and Austria. Check our website for details.

Our goal is to support the work of yoga teachers and organizations who are out in the world sharing yoga with populations that normally don't have access. In fact, at this year's Conference we have a special series of workshops on building a successful yoga business that is inclusive and accessible. A special thank you to Jess Rhodes for putting these programs together.

Whether you are able to be with us in person, or you connect some other way, we hope you'll join us in helping to shift the paradigm to a yoga community that emphasizes inclusion, diversity, equal access, and empowerment, so that we can share the peace and power of yoga with all.

Thanks to Laura Sevika Douglass, Heidi Turcot, Sevika Ford, Megan Zander, Rev. Vidya Vonne, and all the contributors, for making this Journal come to life. We hope you enjoy it!

Om, 

Jivana Heyman, Founder  Accessible
Yoga

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Dianne Bondy
- Cheri Clampett
- Matthew Sanford
- Sonia Sumar
- Nischala Joy Devi

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Oversees all of Accessible Yoga's activities – this committee is made up of experienced Accessible Yoga teachers who are committed to sharing yoga with all, and expanding the Accessible Yoga movement. We are focused on service and empowerment, including our dedication to having people with disabilities in leadership roles within the organization.

- Jivana Heyman
- Maitreyi Picerno
- Megan Zander
- Patrice Priya Wagner
- Shakti Bell
- Sarani Fedman
- Ana Killingstad
- Rev. Rudra Swartz



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ACCESSIBLE YOGA TEAMS

The Accessible Yoga teams came out of our 1st conference in 2015 when so many people came forward to get involved in this movement. We now have 8 teams of Yogis working on all aspects of Accessible Yoga- we couldn't do it without them! The teams are working on organizing the Conference, as well as our other activities- such as our social media awareness campaigns and Accessible Yoga celebrations around the world. Each team wrote a mission statement to describe the work that they are doing. If you want to be involved, please email us at info@accessibleyoga.org.

Team Mission Statements

LOGISTICS TEAM

TANIA SHANTI ISAAC-DUTTON , ROBIN AMARDEEP KAUR SCHIEVINK , JENNIFER GASNER

The Logistics Team's mission is to support the planning and organization of the annual Accessible Yoga Conference (AYC) by locating venues, coordinating transportation, scheduling lodging for presenters and staff, and all other 'behind the scenes' details. We communicate with other teams to create a supportive, collaborative, and collective community. By meeting monthly and designating volunteer assignments, we strive to create a structure of systematic support that enables all teammates and attendees to thrive in their experience at AYC.

INREACH TEAM

CHERIE HOTCHKISS, JUDY DOLCINI,

The Inreach Team establishes and maintains communications with the participants that attended the inaugural Accessible Yoga Conference - the first Accessible Yoga Ambassadors! We are also connecting with and welcoming new Ambassadors who are registering for this year's conference. Inreach is organizing all data to create a single system to carry Accessible Yoga forward as it grows.

OUTREACH TEAM

IRENE VANHULSENTOP, AMY HERNANDEZ

The Outreach Team supports Accessible Yoga by identifying and reaching out to individuals and organizations that share Yoga with communities that have been excluded or underserved. To support those individuals and organizations, we created and maintain a database of contact information. Outreach shares conference, scholarship, sponsorship and International information with this database, which continues to expand.

SCHOLARSHIP TEAM

VALERIE ROBERTS, SUSAN FORD, NICOLE SANOSKI

Working together in an effort to provide financial accessibility to yoga teachers and Accessible Yoga students combined, the Scholarship Team's goals encompass inclusive communication with new and returning Accessible Yoga Ambassadors. We strive to offer a welcoming environment for new Ambassadors through open communication. We encourage all Ambassadors to get involved by sharing the goals of Accessible Yoga with their personal networks and beyond.

FUNDRAISING TEAM

NANCY NANDINI BRANDON, MARIA AMMA FANDINO

The Accessible Yoga Fundraising team is committed to financial accessibility. We raise funds from a diversified group of sources in order to strengthen the mission and network development of Accessible Yoga, and provide access to all who desire it. By conducting donor research to identify new sources of potential funds, we attempt to reach and engage external audiences, caring about building long-term donor relationships. Our fundraising efforts strive for a fundamental transparency practice that demonstrates accountability to donors.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

SARAH ELIZABETH HELT, NATALIE DUNBAR, BONNY CHIPMAN, SEVIKA FORD (DESIGN), MARY BICKEL (DESIGN)

Through collaborative efforts the Communications Team uses all forms of social media to reach the public on behalf of the Accessible Yoga Movement. We, as a team, post to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and our Accessible Yoga Blog in an effort to keep all our yoga connections up to date on what we're doing, where, and how. In this digital age, the Communications Team plays a vital role in connecting students to teachers, teachers to institutions, and bringing Accessible Yoga to the world.

INTERNATIONAL TEAM

KATJA SANDSCHNEIDER, HERSHA CHELLARAM, ARTUR ARYA, KARIN MAITRI PERKMANN, ALESSANDRA UMA COCCHI, SIVAPRIYA REBOLLO, CLAIRE SHRADDHA FELTHAM, NATALIA MADHURI CHRISTOPHE, GABRIELLA PIAZZA, PRIYA PERNILLA HALDEN

The Accessible Yoga International Team is dedicated to building a worldwide network of Accessible Yoga teachers and students. We engage yogis from all over the world to be aware of the great possibilities that yoga offers to people with disabilities or people that have been excluded from these teachings. By creating a strong network we learn from all the different circumstances in each and every country and support each other in spreading Accessible Yoga around the globe.

NYC TEAM

HAMSA SPAGNOLA, ANJALI SOMERSTEIN, NANCY O'BRIEN

The NYC Team is focused on creating the first Accessible Yoga Conference in New York City, NY. This first East Coast Conference is scheduled for May 19-21, 2017 at the Integral Yoga Institute on West 13th Street in Manhattan, and the Church of the Village, just down the block. This event will include over 20 presenters and panelists addressing a vast array of topics related to making yoga accessible and available to all.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOGA FOR THE SPECIAL CHILD®

Sonia Sumar

43 years ago, my daughter Roberta was born with Down Syndrome, and at that time there were no early intervention programs. The doctors told me there was not much I could do for her. The doctor said, "Just wait until she reaches the age of seven and then you put her in a special school." Born into a family where my mother was a very spiritual person, I felt in my heart that Roberta was born for a very important purpose, like all of us. We are all here accomplishing great duties in life. I felt that Roberta's life was no less than anyone else's life, so I started to think about what I can do with her to improve her condition.

I never planned to teach a Yoga for the Special Child® program, never planned to write a book, never planned to be traveling around... these are all higher plans. Roberta was my first child with special needs and for almost 15 years I was trained by her to teach yoga,

By the time Roberta was three, other children with disabilities were coming to me for yoga. At that time, I thought that whatever techniques I had used with my own daughter, would be able to be used to meet the needs of all children. I always had to be re-inventing myself, learning how to

"Things go so harmoniously when you are doing something from the heart."

connect with these kids so that I could reach and meet their needs. I could feel the diversity of each of their individualized temperaments, minds, and emotions and I always had to be adapting. Even today, traveling around the world, I always have to reinvent myself and get connected with that child in front of me. I have learned it's not so much about the body as it's the soul-to-soul connection,

which is one of our keys that we teach in our program.

For the 15 years I was trained by Roberta, I feel that I was the one growing in each situation. We grow and learn so much from these children. I totally believe that the real meaning of our lives here is love - learning how to love unconditionally. These

children have that. They can learn love faster than any one of us. While traveling, I have seen things you can't imagine but I have seen happiness in their eyes. Although in very poor situations, they teach you about happiness,



real happiness...not happiness because they got a new pair of shoes, or a new dress, happiness that comes from other kinds of accomplishments. So many little things make them the happiest person in the world. They are just connected with that source

of happiness inside of them, like they know they are not of this body. The child is in that body for the other kind of purpose, the highest one perhaps. I am sure of that.

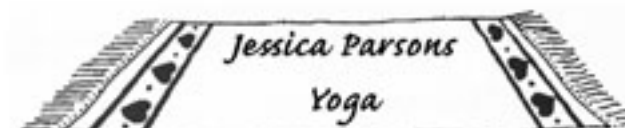
At Yoga for the Special Child®, we don't use any props or toys. We learn to

engage children from a deeper place to get that connection from outside-in to inside-out. Look into my eyes, lets talk, let's get connected and know each other on higher levels. That is what Yoga for the Special Child® is all about.

Sonia Sivakami Sumar is internationally known for her pioneering work using yoga therapy with special children. She has owned and directed centers for Yoga for the Special Child™ in Chicago and in Brazil, where she achieved remarkable results working with children who have Down syndrome and other challenges. She travels extensively, conducting workshops and training programs throughout the United States, Europe, South America, Asia and most recently in Africa. She is also the author of the book, *Yoga for the Special Child*. www.specialyoga.com

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AN INVITATION TO PRACTICE: OPENING THE DOOR TO STUDENTS OF ALL ABILITIES

Jivana Heyman



I started teaching yoga in 1995, and I remember the second class I ever taught because it was terrifying. It was a beginning level class, and I walked a woman who was probably in her 80s with her leg in a brace. The butterflies that were already in my stomach did an extra little flip.

Out of fear, I decided that all I could do was teach the basic class I had been trained to teach and pray for help. Once we got started, I saw that she had a very advanced practice, and I realized that she didn't need me at all! In fact, she was teaching me a valuable lesson—don't judge a book by its cover. Don't make assumptions about people's abilities or experience-level based on outward appearances.

This eye-opening experience, and the fact that my best friend was very sick with AIDS, led me to start teach yoga classes for the HIV/AIDS community in San Francisco. Eventually, my interest grew as I saw the dedication of my students with disabilities and chronic illness. Many of them embraced yoga as a source of healing—not necessarily a physical healing, but a radical personal healing that offered a deep peace. They inspired me to dig deeper in my personal practice and to consider innovative ways to open the doors to yoga.

I know yoga teachers want to serve their students to the best of their abilities. But, we don't all receive clear training in how to make our classes user-friendly for people of

all abilities and body types. Here are some suggestions that might help in this regard:

See all students as equals—We often hear the expression that, "We are one." As teachers we can put this teaching into practice by seeing that spark of the Divine in each student. On a simple level, this means saying hello to each student and looking them in the eye, giving each student equal attention during class, and seeing beyond the physical body to respect each person regardless of their physical appearance or ability.

Open the door for all students—Keep your mind open to each student's potential. If a student is unable to do a pose the way you are teaching it, consider it a challenge for you! In my experience, advanced yoga teachers are the ones who can make a pose, or any yoga practice, work for every student who comes to them. The more physically limited a student is, the more creative the teacher can be. This may mean asking the student to collaborate with you in finding a form that works—or trying a few different variations to see what's most effective.

Move beyond right and wrong—Ask yourself what your motivation is for teaching yoga. Are we teaching gymnastics or cultivating an inner connection? Considering all the amazing benefits of *asana* practice can we really say that someone is doing a pose wrong? Perhaps the only wrong way to do a pose is a way that causes injury.

Break down the pose—*Asana* can increase energy flow, improve digestion through abdominal massage, lengthen the spine, calm the mind, and so much more. If a pose feels too challenging for your students, consider breaking it down into parts according to its benefits. For example, a seated forward bend (*Paschimottanasana*) offers a stretch to the hamstrings as well as an inward surrender. For students who struggle in this pose, consider offering Staff Pose (*Dandaasana*) for a hamstring stretch, and Child's Pose (*Balasana*) for the experience of surrender. By breaking poses down by their benefits we can work towards offering all students the benefit of a full practice.

Inspire your students—Bring inspiration rather than competition. Generally, when teaching we offer a form of a pose to the whole class, and then if someone is struggling we offer them a "modification." Consider a different approach: teach the whole class a gentle variation of a pose, then offer individual students "advanced"

variations. Or offer a few different variations of a pose and have the students choose which they want to practice. Remember, most people will try to do the most challenging form you offer. So be conscious of your language in suggesting that one variation is more "advanced" than another. What is "advanced" anyway? My teacher, Swami Satchidananda, used to say that, "Yoga is not just standing on your head, as many people think, but learning how to stand on your own two feet."

Build community—*Sangha*, spiritual community, is one of the most important elements in our spiritual practice. This is also true for our students. So, building a community that is welcoming to students of all abilities is a wonderful way to support them. But this is just a start. Actively seeking out students of different abilities is the way to invite everyone to practice. This invitation can be reflected in your marketing materials as well as your language. Even in the intention that you set for your teaching practice, you can envision yourself serving all students equally, and sharing the blessing of yoga with everyone who is interested.

Reprinted with permission from *LA Yoga Magazine*, 2015



Jivana Heyman, eRYT-500, IYM, is founder of Accessible Yoga, which includes Conferences, Trainings, and a new online Network dedicated to sharing yoga with every body. He is co-owner of the Santa Barbara Yoga Center, manager of the Integral Yoga Institute of San Francisco, California, and an Integral Yoga Minister. With over twenty years of training and teaching in the Integral Yoga tradition, Jivana has specialized in teaching yoga to people with disabilities with an emphasis on sharing yoga philosophy. His passion is making yoga accessible to everyone.

He has led over forty yoga teacher training programs over the past 16 years, created the Accessible Yoga Training program in 2007, and currently leads trainings around the US and in Europe. In December 2015, Jivana was invited

to teach Accessible Yoga at the United Nations in Geneva, and continues to work toward expanding access to the teachings of yoga. For more information about Jivana and to find dates for upcoming Accessible Yoga Training programs please visit www.accessibleyoga.org.



BEYOND MODIFICATIONS: BRINGING ALL OF YOGA'S TOOLS TO PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS

Steffany Moonaz

Envision teaching yoga for people with arthritis and it includes a lot of modifications, adjustments, and the extensive use of props. Yoga teachers work with students to find versions of each *asana* that remains true to the essence of the pose, working within any movement limitations, without creating pain or joint discomfort. While this can be one aspect of teaching yoga to those with arthritis, there is no need to strive for a "magical *asana* sequence" that addresses arthritis in a particular body part. Yoga is a holistic process.

A common mistake in the yoga therapy community is thinking of yoga as if it were physical therapy. This mistake is unfortunate as what is lost is what makes yoga a unique therapeutic process; somatic practices (postures, breathing practices and relaxation techniques) combined with mindfulness to improve wellness and help us access the spirit. Yoga is a powerful healing modality

that can be used alongside physical therapy.

For over a decade, I have been reading the existing research on the effects of yoga for people with arthritis. While the research adds to our understanding of yoga's usefulness, researchers only look at an *asana* sequence and its effect on the joints. This is important, but it should not be confused with



the role of teaching yoga. Yoga teachers need to "get the joint issues out of the way" through support, use of props, compassion and awareness, so that yoga can work its magic on the whole person: body, mind, and soul.

Just as yoga can improve overall physical fitness for

healthy individuals, it can improve fitness for people with arthritis. Fitness is particularly important for individuals with arthritis who are prone to muscle loss and challenges with balance. Yoga improves flexibility and strengthens the muscles necessary for balance, which prevents dangerous falls. The regular practice of yoga enables these individuals to maintain their mobility. Improved strength means greater joint stability, a reduction in the muscle loss that accompanies some forms of arthritis and an increased ability to participate in everyday activities that can be challenging as joints deteriorate.

Yoga allows those with a chronic, disabling disease to realize what their bodies *can* do. It changes their mental narrative from one of "loss and disability" to one of "ability." The regular practice of yoga fosters a connection to their body which may have been lost during years of disease progression and



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reduced activity. Yoga can teach students to be present in the moment, and to adjust to the needs of their body on a particular day, without judgment. Arthritis changes how one experiences the body every day, so the skill of being present and accepting the strengths and limitations of the day serves these students exceptionally well. Even when they don't get on the mat they are learning how to adapt to the day based on how they feel.

One of yoga's biggest strengths is helping students learn to relax and to be mindful. Having a chronic disease is stressful. Stress can exacerbate arthritis making it even worse. Relaxation and meditation break this damaging cycle of stress reactivity.

Group yoga classes are important as they connect people with arthritis to others who are thriving. The group class becomes a safe place

where those new to yoga interact with people who are living a full and active life. They can hear the journey that those more experienced in yoga took to arrive at a place of wellness.

Finally, yoga changes behaviors. When people start to feel connected, they want to engage in other acts of self-care. They may begin to eat healthier foods, go for a walk outside, make time for themselves, or make a better effort to be adherent with their medical care.

When we think about bringing the tools of yoga to the arthritis community, it is incredibly important to look beyond the modification of *asana* as the primary healing tool of yoga. The goal of the yoga teacher is to make the *asanas* possible, so the totality of what yoga has to offer comes through to our students, safely and effectively.

Steffany Moonaz, PhD, RYT-500 is a yoga therapist and researcher in Baltimore, MD. Dr. Moonaz spent 8 years at Johns Hopkins University, creating and evaluating a yoga program for individuals with the chronic diseases of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. Steffany is now working to bring yoga to people with arthritis in communities nationwide, as well as educating yoga teachers about the unique needs of this population. She also serves as a mentor for several emerging researchers who are working to study the effects of yoga for various health conditions. Steffany is on the faculty for the Masters in Yoga Therapy at the Maryland University of Integrative Health. www.arthritis.yoga

YOGA OF RECOVERY

Durga Leela



through addiction to understand the depth of their yearnings. Students who participate in these

Addiction is a growing issue that impacts society, families, and individuals in monumental ways. The extent of the modern addiction problem clearly illustrates that people can become addicted to anything: alcohol, drugs, relationships, work, the internet, cell phones, etc. Addiction is an easy path to take in our society because over-consumption and hyper-sensory stimulation are cultural norms. Fortunately, the universality of addiction provides a clue to understanding the root of addiction. Addiction is best viewed as an externalization of our need for an inner spiritual life.

Yoga of Recovery views every person suffering with addiction as a seeker, someone who is inherently trying to transcend the mundane and reconnect at a deeper spiritual level. Yoga psychology offers incredibly useful advice on how to deal with the mind, which is often a barrier to deeper spiritual knowledge and experience. The yogic philosophy of the Self broadens our understanding of who we are by clarifying that the human experience is a spiritual one. Our deepest cravings are to nourish our spiritual sense of self; if we do not fulfill this craving we may turn to external sources to find satisfaction.

I undertook the study of yoga and Ayurveda for the purpose of improving my own health and well-being in 2001. As my spiritual path deepened, it became clear to me that part of my spiritual practice was to bring holistic healing to people in recovery. I offered the first Yoga of Recovery (YoR) retreat in August 2005 as a way for those working

retreats recover a sense of balance and ease by adopting an Ayurvedic lifestyle alongside the principles of recovery outlined in 12 step programs.

When I first began offering Yoga of Recovery retreats, I assumed the guests would be people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. What I found was that many of them had already maintained sobriety for considerable lengths of time. Yet, they had shifted from their initial drug of choice into dependence on some other substance or behavior. For example, they may no longer be dependent on alcohol, but may be using addiction to sugar or codependency in relationships as a method to self-regulate.

The most subtle and ubiquitous 'attachments' (that no one can avoid entirely) are addictions and attachments to food and people. The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, speaks of these same concepts when he discusses that our "instincts run wild" because they involve our "legitimate, natural desires to eat, to reproduce, for society, security and companionship." Yoga of Recovery capitalizes on the natural tendency for good food, companionship, and security by offering a truly empowering personal program of recovery that addresses all three: a yogic and Ayurvedic diet, a community dedicated to wellness, and the security of our relationship to the Divine.

Understanding disease from a yogic and

Ayurvedic perspective is essential for those with addiction. The constitutional model of Ayurveda (*doshas*) helps us recognize our in-built tendencies and mental habits. We look at the stress response of the different *doshic* types, unmanaged emotions, and explore how the mind works by repetition, creating deep grooves of self-destructive habits. This helps individuals to understand the areas where they are vulnerable under stress. Ayurveda helps us determine the kinds of activities and changes in our lifestyle that best restore our mind and body. Simple daily and seasonal routines can help to maintain health and prevent disease.

Ayurveda is the science of life. We can all benefit from its lifestyle recommendations. Through the Ayurvedic practices we revitalize our gut, brain and immune system. This gives us the strong foundation in health that is required to face the challenges and stresses of daily life without resorting to old addictive behaviors.

Yoga of Recovery is, perhaps most importantly, a consideration of the narrative, or story of our addiction. During our retreats and courses we talk about our experience with addictive habits that we are recovering from. This helps us develop more openness and compassion around both our own lingering compulsions and the struggle of people with a different 'drug of choice' than ours. It is imperative that we understand how we act out and why. As we begin to understand that our search for satisfaction is an important aspect of our spiritual life, we begin to engage in lifestyle choices that support our spiritual and psychological

growth. We investigate the root causes and reasons for our compulsions, attachments and addictive imbalances. We ask ourselves, "What in our nature compels us to seek for satisfaction outside of ourselves?"

Yoga of Recovery is based in the perspective of unity. I do not believe that those suffering from addiction should be stigmatized through an 'us and them' mentality. In truth, we are all addicted to some degree. We all, as humans, have addictive natures in some respect, so anyone (not just someone in recovery from a drug or alcohol addiction) can benefit from the Yoga of Recovery program. Ultimately, the purpose of life is Self-realization, so everyone who is drawn to the philosophy, psychology and physical practice of yoga would enjoy this retreat. It is the evolution of the solution.

Yoga of Recovery is for people who are looking to overcome any of their addictive or self-destructive behaviors. It is also beneficial for people with a history of addiction in themselves or within their family as it provides a framework for understanding and working with addiction compassionately. Guests range in age from 16 to 84 years old and experience every type of addiction. My hope is that people who come to Yoga of Recovery become empowered in their daily life choices. I hope they leave with a feeling of awe and reverence toward the Divine healing power and have found ways to participate in the healing energy of nature, the world around us, and be there for each other and their communities.

Durga Leela, BA, CAS, PKS, Yoga Acharya, is the founder of Yoga of Recovery. Durga holds the RYT-500 qualification, having completed both the Sivananda Yoga teachers Training Course and an Advanced Yoga Training. She is also extensively trained in Meditation and Vedanta. She is a Clinical Ayurvedic and Pancha Karma Specialist, trained both in the US and India and serves as the Director of the Ayurveda Programs at the Yoga Farm in California, since 2003. She is a professional member and speaker for the National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA) and International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), also a member of Yoga Alliance. Durga is a practical, down to earth, and to-the-point speaker who has worked on her own path of recovery. She has been a grateful member of 12 step fellowship for over 16 years. She has a great sense of humor and a real warmth for understanding the trials and tribulations of our human condition. Durga has participated in all the Recovery 2.0 online conferences. www.yogaofrecovery.com



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Lakshmi Voelker

Have you ever gone to a chair yoga class, but were unable to accomplish some of the postures or *asanas* that were adapted to the chair? Whether you are on a wheel chair or an office chair, you will learn how every *asana* can be adapted to match your levels of flexibility and your personal "Sat Nam"—your True Identity!

Get Fit Where You Sit!® is a program of freedom, fun and acceptance. We all have different bodies/minds and need to feel safe on the chair. You will learn how to create safety and a sense of fun and exploration. You will learn how the chair becomes an extension of your body. The seat an extension of your lap. The back of your chair becomes your back. The leg of the chair mirrors your legs. When viewed from a spiritual lens, the chair becomes a wonderful tool for transformation. The wheel chair/chair becomes your friend and partner—not your enemy.

In this Get Fit Where You Sit® Program, you will learn

how Chair Yoga makes every pose, on any chair anywhere, accessible to individuals with varying levels of flexibility. The program will include the Chinese Acupressure Hand and Knee Movements, Do-In, Foot Reflexology, Sun and Moon Salutations, *Matrika Shakti*, *Kirtan Kriya* and *Pranayama*. You will also learn Lee Albert's IPT, or Integrated Positional Therapy-strain/counter strain that is used to relieve painful muscles. We will incorporate joy and humor into the program, so "hold onto your chair—be ready for a fun filled experience."

Everyone's *asanas* will look somewhat different. Perhaps your flexibility varies from one side to the other or your upper body is more flexible than your lower body. You will vary your practice to meet your body exactly where it is. You will experience the wonder of bringing the age-old, well-researched yogic benefits right to your very own chair. You will learn the practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and

satya (truth) while sitting on a chair. We accept that this is different and that it is okay—very okay!

You enter into *Tadasana*, the Mountain, by coming toward the front edge of the chair. This starts engaging all muscles naturally and safely. Press down the 3 points in your feet: under the big toe, the pinky toe at the ball of the foot and the center of the heel. Align the legs hip width apart. Zip an imaginary jacket up the front of your body lengthening the spine and lifting the sternum. Your chin drops into alignment as you rest it on a fist. The imaginary jacket turns around so you zip down your back again aligning the spine. Crown up, sits bones anchored to the chair seat, shoulders rolled up, back, and down, palms face down on your thighs to fully ground your mountain. The muscles are engaged as you start burning calories just by sitting up on your chair. (The reverse of which I term "slump *asana*.") You then close your eyes and imagine your favorite mountain and

say out loud or to yourself, "I am the mountain. I am stable, solid, and secure!" Suddenly from this practice, your body/mind dynamic has changed. Your life has

changed. You have become grounded and at the same time lifted, so you do not "load your spine." You are still sitting. From this divine seat all the other *asanas* emanate

and return. You become happy and free. Your confidence and self-esteem are lifted to the Light of Your Spirit! Let the healing begin.

Lakshmi Voelker, eRYT-500, KYTA, YA, IAYT is a certified Kripalu yoga instructor, a member of the Yoga Alliance and International Association of Yoga Therapists, and holder of other certifications. Lakshmi is celebrating her 50th year in the yoga world and has dedicated her life to creating accessible paths to wellness. By creating Chair Yoga, she was able bring adaptive fitness and exercise programs to those who could not benefit from traditional methods of physical activity due to age or limiting physical condition. She created Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ in 1982 when one of her students was stricken with arthritis and could no longer get down on the floor to practice Yoga. In 1999, she authored and produced her widely acclaimed "Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga: The Sitting Mountain Series" CD/cassette. Following the success of her CD, she then created the first *Get Fit Where You Sit!*® DVD Video, a series of innovative Chair Yoga Fitness and Exercise DVDs in 2007. She made breakthroughs in two areas: extensive 20 minute step-by-step instruction of each class providing multiple levels of flexibility (LOF) and shorter 10 minute chair yoga classes. Lakshmi certifies Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ teachers (LVCYT's) around the world via live certifications and online teacher trainings via Skype. There are now 1500 LVCYT's worldwide. www.getfitwhereyousit.com



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EMBRACING OURSELVES THROUGH YOGA



Cheri Clampett

Yoga is union. This idea is simple at its core, yet breathtaking in the myriad ways it may

manifest. From the bodies we live in, down to the smallest particle, the experience of union comes through embrace - another seemingly simple concept with many beautiful variations and expressions.

At the heart of the Accessible Yoga movement is the simple belief that yoga, in its vast array of forms, stands ready to embrace us, and to help us embrace ourselves, no matter the set of capabilities we are working with in any given moment. It is the belief that yoga, itself being a flexible art form, innately carries compassion for who we are and what we are going through in each moment. It is a silent resonance that reminds us that simply being present, in the present moment, is itself a great teaching.

In its most obvious form, Accessible Yoga focuses on adapting *asanas* for the particular physical circumstances of a yoga student. Mind and body equally influence each other - finding the exact right fit for both, so they can symbiotically support each other, is truly a gift. While *asana* is most often the public's first, and possibly only, association with yoga, it is the combining of *asana* with other yogic teachings that most often creates the blissful simultaneous harmony of mind and body.

In Therapeutic Yoga, we combine

supported restorative poses with gentle yoga, breathwork, guided meditation, and hands-on healing. These and other modalities support and magnify the benefits of *asana* while also providing a wide palette that is particularly useful when *asana* choices are limited. For instance, I was once asked to work with a woman who was at City of Hope receiving a bone marrow transplant and radiation treatment for cancer. Even though she had limited movement from her bed, I encouraged her to work with her breathing and lead her through a guided meditation. In the guided meditation, I invited her to visualize pure glacier healing water flowing through her body, enhancing her immune function as well as cooling the burns. I also offered her some off-body energy healing. The combination greatly reduced her pain levels and helped bring peace in a time of crisis.


As yoga teachers, nurses, physical therapists, and other healthcare professionals, the space that we hold, the intention that we bring forth in our heart, is just as important as



the techniques that we use. Sacred space is often missing in our fast paced world, yet there is a deeper part of our humanity which recognizes it and responds to it. Holding sacred space starts simply by caring. From there, it raises to the next level when we hold kindness and compassion in our heart. Finally, as we adjust and personalize techniques for each individual that we

work with, we send a message to the mind and body that if they wish to transform, to release, to heal, to be authentically where they need to be, that now is the time and this sacred space is the place. In other words, we hold an invitation for self-embrace, for a return to union within. This is the gift of yoga and it is the heart that beats at the core of Accessible Yoga.

Cheri Clampett, CYT, eRYT-500, is a certified yoga therapist with over 25 years of teaching experience. She is the founder and director of the Therapeutic Yoga Training Program. She co-led the Integrative Yoga Therapy Teacher Training and has presented Therapeutic Yoga at the White Lotus Foundation Teacher Training, Beth Israel Medical Center, and the Rusk Institute at NYU Langone Medical Center. Cheri currently teaches yoga at the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara, where she founded the yoga program for cancer patients in 1999. She also teaches monthly workshops at the Santa Barbara Yoga Center, and brings Therapeutic Yoga to the Santa Barbara Healing Sanctuary retreats. As a certified yoga therapist, Cheri focuses on the healing aspects of yoga: freeing the body, breath, and flow of energy through practicing with awareness, compassion and love. Cheri is co-author of the *Therapeutic Yoga Kit*, published in January 2009 by Inner Traditions, and available on Amazon and at your local bookseller. www.therapeuticyogatraining.com



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noun / yōgə bəz / 1: the feeling of excitement or euphoria after a yoga class. 2: a St. Louis, Missouri based 501c3 non-profit organization committed to building wellness through community and empowering others to lead from within.

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YOGA FOR ALL

Dianne Bondy

I have been practicing some form of yoga for the past 43 years of my life. During this time my yoga practice moved from a form of exercise to a life altering experience. Yoga is a practice that calls us to be allied together in the fight for equality. Together we can create more active and diverse representation of humanity within the dominant culture; each and every one of us matters. The people who have been pushed to the margins of our society can be pulled back into the center through a communal effort. "Accessibility" in yoga has become code for working with disabled bodies, but the phrase also asks us, "How can you contribute to making the practice of yoga about everyone?"

When I started teaching yoga it was a hobby that I wanted to share with friends. My teaching evolved from a small class of friends to a worldwide stage. What made my practice shift to an international stage? It was the quest for inclusion and accessibility.

Discrimination and division affect us all. Yoga brought me peace, self-awareness, empowerment and self-love. These are the very qualities that marginalized and underrepresented communities need; yet, mainstream representations of yoga do not include the wide variety of ages, beauty, bodies, race, gender and sexual identities that truly make up yoga.

What sparked my fire (and ire) was not seeing the wonderful diversity of people that I know practice yoga represented in the mainstream media. Mainstream media hijacked yoga by only representing young, white, cisgendered, and highly sexualized females. This norm not only devalues white women by turning them into sexualized marketing material, it seriously limits the view of who practices yoga. Those who are not represented feel oppressed and are marginalized. Sadly, the mainstream media of yoga culture oppresses and marginalizes the same group of people that the dominant culture always excludes: the disabled population, the

LGBTQ community, people of color, and older communities.

North American mainstream media is defining who and what is beautiful, celebrated and accepted. It is as if the media declares that they decide who is valuable. Your place is limited – invisible. I have heard these messages my entire life. Yoga is not limited, it should be a space for everyone to return to wholeness, to find peace. I am proud to say that I am a disruptor! I decided I needed to disrupt the limitations proposed by the media and I began encouraging others to do the same.

I created Yoga For All as a vision of inclusivity. This was a space where everyone would be welcome and celebrated. I organized workshops and talks around yoga inclusion and diversity hoping to share it with the world. With the power of this vision, I tried my luck and approached major yoga conferences. I applied to every single conference I could think of; every single one politely declined. My work was interesting, but it was not what mainstream yoga culture wanted to

explore at that time. Because our identity is created in community, I began to question myself and the effectiveness of my work. It saddened me to know that mainstream yoga culture was more interested in keeping diversity at the margins than leading the way for a global shift in consciousness.

After all my rejections, I decided to focus on my students. My students appreciated my breaking down the barriers that keep people, like me, away from the practice of yoga. I decided to use social media as a platform to share my message. The media is generally controlled by the dominant discourse, but with social media the power of voice was given to me. I could be seen and heard through the power of this platform! I was no longer invisible.

People resonated and were hungry for my message of diversity and inclusion. The Yoga and Body Image Coalition was founded, and I was contacted to be a part of the leadership team. Through this partnership I was invited to shape the change I wanted to see in the yoga world. I was socially validated. People did care! *Yoga Journal* and *Off the Mat into the World* called me and invited me to a panel discussion in San Diego,

California. Off I went to what would be the start of the next chapter of my yoga career. When I arrived, I was terrified to tell my story of exclusion. I thought I was still alone in my fight for diversity and inclusion in the mainstream world of yoga. I put fat black *asana* out there in hopes that others will join me - and they have.



Many people have been excluded from yoga for a number of reasons. Religious beliefs may keep some from the practice. For others, not seeing themselves represented in the mainstream media and aspirational yoga marketing means they shy away from the practice. Still others have difficulty finding the root of yoga due to cultural appropriation, which has sanitized and scrubbed the essence and roots of acceptance from the practice. For others the focus on able-bodied individuals

keeps them from thinking this practice could be for me. All of these concerns demonstrate the need for Accessible Yoga.

We need to have more honest conversations around homogenous, white supremacist, able-bodied, heterosexual, privilege in yoga culture and the world as a whole. The yoga mat is

a mirror of our larger society. The only way we can change the world is if we all participate and take action. I was fortunate enough to be invited to present at the first Accessible Yoga Conference. I was so nervous as this was my first major conference and the spirit of the conference spoke so passionately to my teaching. Talking

about cultural diversity can be a charged and emotional experience but it is necessary if we want to create cultural intelligence. For me, Accessible Yoga strives to remove all barriers to yoga. It is important to create a yoga space where diversity and inclusivity are celebrated. My offering at the Accessible Yoga Conference was about encouraging cultural diversity. I was happy that the message of diversity landed with people who were ready to talk – ready to shift the culture. The Accessible Yoga Conference

was an opportunity to learn and to share validation that I was on the right track! The conference gave me access to all the incredible people in the field of accessibility and inclusion. All communities and people need this validation because our identity is largely socially constructed.

I appreciate my allies in this work. When we come together we are so much

more successful. There are many amazing people doing this work. We are not alone. I loved every minute of my experience as the opening keynote speaker at the 2015 Yoga and Race Conference. It was hard to leave Berkeley. The campus and the people were amazing, the conversations were stimulating, and I could feel the understanding and enlightenment in the

air. While I will cherish that experience forever, this is only the beginning! What I have learned from this process is to stay the course, speak up, demand representation and do the representing. I no longer accept that things can't change! I will try to change them. I owe it to myself, to my children and humanity! We are richer together.

Dianne Bondy, eRYT-500, is a celebrated yoga teacher, social justice activist and leading voice of the Yoga For All movement. Her inclusive view of yoga *asana* and philosophy inspires and empowers thousands of followers around the world - regardless of their shape, size, ethnicity, or level of ability. She applies over 1000 hours of training to help her students find freedom, self-expression and radical self-love in their yoga practice. She shares her message and provides affordable access to online yoga classes, workshops and tutorials at her virtual studio: Yogasteya.com. Dianne contributes to *Yoga International*, *Yoga Journal*, *Do You Yoga*, and *Elephant Journal*. She is featured and profiled in international media outlets: *The Guardian*, *Huffington Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, and more. She is a spokesperson for diversity in yoga and yoga for larger bodies, as seen in her work with Pennington's, Gaiam, and the Yoga & Body Image Coalition. Her work is published in the books: *Yoga and Body Image*, and *Yes Yoga Has Curves*. www.diannebondyyoga.com



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**IREST® YOGA NIDRA MEDITATION:
A LIVING PRACTICE OF CONNECTION
& BELONGING**

Stephanie Lopez

People practice yoga and meditation to discover a sense of ease, balance, and purpose. I believe there is a deeper motivation as well: a longing for connection with one's self and the rest of the world. I've found this yearning is satisfied through iRest Yoga Nidra. This transformative yet simple practice uncovers an undeniable ground of well-being and interconnectedness. It brings forth a direct sense of wholeness that is unchanging regardless of life's circumstances.

iRest is a modern adaptation of the ancient practice of *yoga nidra* and was developed by Richard Miller, a clinical psychologist and researcher, as well

as a yogic scholar and author. iRest comprises a full path of meditation with 3 core principles: the practice

of welcoming, of seeing everything as a messenger, and an awareness of our essential wholeness. These principles are woven through the 10 steps of the protocol forming a potent and healing meditation practice.

As we learn iRest, we begin by welcoming everything just as it is. To practice welcoming is to abide in nonjudgmental presence and simply allow whatever arises in our mind. We learn that welcoming is not

an extra something we do. Rather, it is an essential aspect of being human.

In contrast, struggle is accompanied by tension, contraction, anger, and fear. At its heart is the desire to have things other than what they are. You push away what you don't want and cling to what you desire. There is no denying this pain and struggle, but iRest meditation teaches us to meet these experiences without trying to fix or change them. Imagine the fierce grace of meeting pain as pure physical sensation and gently accepting the emotions and beliefs it engenders. It is through this practice of simply feeling into and allowing pain to be that often brings a shift in its intensity.

"In the course of daily life how often do we feel unseen, disconnected, and disempowered? For many this is an all too frequent experience."

What happens when we let go of the struggle with life? What happens when we simply allow its challenges,

heartbreak, and beauty? In my experience, there is a release of tension, an opening to freedom, and joy in full presence with all the movements of life. At the heart of this welcoming is an ease of being untouched by life's movements. This is an underlying wholeness that cannot be broken.

In the practice of iRest we meet life fully through this combination of welcoming and ease of being. We navigate difficult emotions, beliefs, and memories with an

Inner Resource to rely upon when they become overwhelming. We also come into new insights when our sensations, emotions, and beliefs are seen as messengers. Experiencing them fully develops and deepens a connection with the self. We come into loving and compassionate relationship with ourselves. You're able to hear your voice and what is being asked for on the deepest levels. It is in this state of iRest meditation that habitual patterns are broken and you develop clear and novel responses to life's challenges.

Through this compassionate welcoming,

you develop connection with all parts of yourself and begin to live authentically. There is trust in who you are and what you do, and this belonging with yourself flows into a connection with others. As you live life fully with an undefended heart, you develop a sense of belonging in the world. This intimacy with yourself and others empowers you to live life to its fullest potential.

At the heart of every person is an ease of being and wholeness that has never been broken. I cherish this practice and its simple ability to shine the healing light of truth of who we are.

Stephanie Lopez's teachings are informed by her longtime immersion in the non-dual teachings of yoga as well as her integration of the wisdom traditions of both Eastern spirituality and Western Psychology. Stephanie's compassionate presence, depth of knowledge, and ease of being creates a welcoming space for insightful learning. Stephanie is a Licensed Independent Social Worker, Gestalt Therapist, iRest® Senior Trainer, Retreat Leader and Supervisor, as well as a Certified iRest Teacher and yoga teacher. She also serves as the Director of Operations for the Integrative Restoration Institute. She shares her insights in workshops, retreats, and trainings internationally. www.irest.us

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TRAUMA INFORMED YOGA IS PEOPLE
INFORMED YOGA

Hala Khouri

"Trauma Informed" and "Trauma Sensitive" yoga trainings have become more popular in the last decade as contemporary research confirmed the benefits of a regular yoga practice for individuals who struggle with trauma. While not everyone has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a serious and often debilitating illness, most everyone has experienced some sort of trauma or a general level of stress that impacts their ability to *self-regulate*: to feel safe, grounded and present. The tenants of trauma informed yoga can benefit everyone by helping to create a safe environment in which to explore the deeper healing yoga offers.

Yoga is often called a "mind/body" practice because it can help individuals get in touch with the physical sensations and emotions of the present moment. Yoga postures strengthen the muscles and stretch areas that carry tension

by integrating breathing techniques and mindfulness based practices. Many yoga classes invite participants to notice their sensations and breath. These qualities of yoga make it particularly important for individuals who have experienced trauma, who often have difficulty experiencing and regulating the felt sensations of the moment.

"Stillness is not a regular part of the average North American's life."

Those of us living in urban North American cities may have difficulty with present moment awareness. It is normal in our culture to rush from one thing to the next. When we have down time, we may fill it with food, alcohol, TV or some sort of distraction. We are used to being distracted and disconnected from our bodies. *Stillness is not a regular part of the average North American's life.* When individuals slow down and step on to their yoga mat, they may get in touch with emotions or sensations that are uncomfortable, or that they have managed to avoid.

Being present to discomfort is difficult for the average person, but for people with complex trauma or PTSD, the experience can become painful, overwhelming or re-traumatizing.

Yoga teachers can do their part to create a safe environment for everyone by recognizing that the students who are walking into their classes carry many different experiences in their body and hearts.

The yoga practice may connect them with parts of their body and psyche that they have previously ignored. Yoga teachers can help to normalize how uncomfortable mind-body practices can be, and offer simple techniques that may be effective to work through the discomfort.

A trauma informed perspective asks us to welcome those who are having difficulty with compassion and curiosity. We do not need to judge or pressure our students to become "at ease" or "peaceful" in our class. It is

not necessary for everyone to be happy all the time. Instructing those who suffer to “smile” during a yoga pose may belittle their experience of grief, sadness or discomfort. A trauma informed yoga training can help yoga teachers to become at ease with the discomfort of others and to respond compassionately to the struggle and distractions of their students.

A trauma informed teacher assumes that every student has a perfectly good reason to do what they are doing: looking at their phone, resting, looking distracted, or declining the use of a strap. Being trauma informed means that we create a safe space for anyone who might show up to our classes. It is important that yoga teachers err on the side of caution when they take people into vulnerable territory. Judgment and pressure to perform may create unnecessary shame, pressure or pain. *Just like we are taught to offer safe physical alignment to everyone (not just those with injuries), being trauma informed is a safety protocol that we should offer*

all students (not just those with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Everyone can benefit from a teacher who understands that human beings are complex. A trauma informed class helps those who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and those who are stressed because they have a lot going on. Healing may mean feeling safe enough to go into the uninvestigated parts of ourselves so that we can shine light on thoughts, emotions and sensations that we have been too afraid to acknowledge. This work takes courage and compassion. We are all shaped by life’s challenges.

Being trauma informed is being “people informed.” Trauma sensitive yoga is a framework that asks us to consider the impact of trauma and stress on our actions and words. Trauma informed training helps yoga teachers to be alert and responsive to the full experience of humanity, which includes suffering. Respect for the fullness of the human experience is one of the most important qualities

of a trauma informed teacher.

Here are some guidelines for teachers wanting to be trauma informed in a general class: Assume people are doing the best they can; approach your students with curiosity and kindness.

Take responsibility for your own triggers and reactions; avoid approaching or correcting a student if you are having a negative reaction to them.

Remember that it is not your job to fix your students. Your job is to create a safe environment that allows students to move through what they need to at their own pace.

Let go of your agenda. Some people may find peace through their practice, but others may connect with sadness, grief or anger. Avoid making students feel wrong for their feelings. Invite your students to be compassionate towards themselves.

Know the scope of your practice. If someone is in severe distress, refer them to a good therapist for appropriate help.

trained in Somatic Experiencing, a technique which focuses on trauma’s impact on the body-mind and ways to resolve it. Hala is one of the creators of Off the Mat, Into the World, along with Seane Corn and Suzanne Sterling. This is a non-profit organization dedicated to utilizing the tools of yoga and somatic practices within a justice framework to inspire people to be conscious leaders of change. Through the non-profit A Thousand Joys, Hala works with social workers and direct service providers, educating them on the effects of vicarious trauma and offering them somatic tools to discharge and manage stress and create a culture of wellness. www.halakhouri.com



FITABILITIES

Natasha Baebler

When I was first asked to organize and teach a trauma informed yoga program for students with visual impairments, I knew that the program would need to be unlike any other yoga class I’d taught to date. I had taught trauma informed yoga to adults. I had taught yoga to kids, even taught yoga to kids who are blind. Yet combining the two, the experience of trauma and blindness/visual impairment, was something that to my knowledge hadn’t been done before.

The number one assumption people have made about the FitAbilities program has been that the students have experienced trauma or chronic stress due to their being blind or visually impaired. The reality is that the trauma and visual impairment are two unrelated entities that coexist in each child’s life experience, and thus need to be taken into account separately when designing a yoga program for this population. As the instructor, I need to teach to the blind or visually impaired child keeping his or her primary presenting disability at the forefront

of my instructional techniques. So, if a child is struggling more with their trauma in class than the fact that they can’t see the yoga poses, I need to address the trauma response first leaving instruction specific to the visual impairment on the back burner.

The average yoga instructor might walk into a FitAbilities class and see a form of organized chaos. Not all of the students will be participating in the activity I am leading. Yet to the level that he or she is able, each student will be engaged in the class. To give an example, one student would come sit on his mat at the beginning of class for the opening song and then spend the remainder of class kicking a soccer ball against the gym wall or shooting baskets. As the instructor, I brought all the students over to take turns shooting baskets and then if they missed (which they usually did since none of them could see the basket) they had to pick a yoga pose for everyone to do. After three weeks of looking like he wasn’t engaged in what I was teaching, this student drew a picture on his iPad of himself and his classmates on their yoga mats doing different yoga poses. He was able to tell his teacher who each figure represented and what yoga pose they

were doing in the picture. Yet this student never did a single yoga pose in class. Clearly he was doing yoga. His yoga just looked different than the other students' yoga.

How the pose, or *asana*, looks is so much less important than how the *asana* feels for students with blindness and visual impairment. Since those of us who practice yoga and are also blind experience the world through touch and sound, these senses also need to take precedence in how teachers teach students who are blind. Even a student with significant residual sight, who is only given visual instruction or told to focus on how a pose looks to an outsider, will not have a full experience of the pose because the experience is disconnected from how he or she experiences things in the rest of his or her life. Instructions need to be given through multiple modalities, need to be specific, descriptive, and related to familiar movements or tasks. It is not enough to substitute a visual demonstration of a pose with tactile graphics or even a 3-D model. Students who are blind need more than just descriptive words as well. Believe it or not, there are blind people who are visual

Even some commonplace analogies may not have relevance for a student who has never seen them.

learners. For these students, words are important, but don't create the full picture.

As with any student, be sure to ask before touching a blind student. She may not mind being touched or having you move her body to a particular posture, but she is also most likely capable of moving her own body and certainly deserves the respect of her personal space. If you use what seems like descriptive language such as "reach your arms straight out of your shoulders" and the student with a visual impairment just

stands there, she doesn't have a full picture of what her arms are supposed to be doing. Even more specific verbiage such as "let your arms hang down at your sides, now start to lift them away from your body out to the side until your hands feel as high as your shoulders," seems like a lot more words, but provides your student with a much clearer understanding of what she is to do with her arms in warrior two. Once her arms are out to the side in the correct position, you can become more specific about palms facing down, and move on to what other parts of the body are doing.

Even some commonplace analogies may not have relevance for a student who has never seen them. When I teach airplane pose (warrior three), I pass around a small toy airplane to provide the students with a tangible reference for arm position, like airplane wings.

Perhaps the most important skill that is developed through yoga for students who are blind and visually impaired is their sense of proprioception - their awareness of where they are in space. This is a skill they use to navigate the world without sight. Learning to transition from simple poses like cat to cow and back, or downward facing dog to upward facing dog, can help strengthen a student's proprioception. The key here is to start small with a single focus and work up to larger transitions. Unlike with sighted students whose first journey into yoga flows may be with a sun salutation, students who are blind will need to develop some basic proprioceptive skills before they are able to conceptualize what a transition from a forward fold to plank pose should feel like and how to move to get their body from *chaturanga* to downward facing dog. Simply telling them to lift their hips into the air from lying on their belly isn't enough.

If you, as a teacher, understand the anatomy and function of the poses you are teaching (i.e. downward facing dog is about length in the spine rather than in the hamstrings) you are one step closer to being able to provide meaningful instruction to a student who is blind or visually impaired. The more you hone your vocabulary, particularly movement-related adjectives, the more clearly you will be able to give instructions to all of your students without the need to physically demonstrate. The more familiar you are with words that describe how children move, the easier it will be for you to find a variety of ways to help a blind or visually impaired student find their version of any yoga pose you choose to teach them.

Even more important than the language I use, or the manipulatives I bring to class, are the questions I ask. Asking a student how a pose feels is of extreme importance in developing a blind or visually impaired student's sense of success and consistency in yoga. I can talk about a pose and how it should feel, but once a student feels that pose in his own body, he will remember

where his body needs to go the next time you call for that pose. Perhaps more than with fully sighted students, blind yogis will repeat even uncomfortable poses in the name of doing them right if not given the opportunity to find a more "correct for your body" version and develop that into muscle memory. Once that light bulb goes on and the student's body clicks in to what the pose feels like, it will stick, allowing them to return there again and again. Muscle memory builds fast for people who are used to getting a majority of their environmental information through touch, so it's important to tackle this the first time I teach a pose.

So I challenge you, take a class with your eyes closed. Listen to the words the teacher uses. If you didn't already know what the pose being cued looks like, would you know from his or her words? Are you aware of how poses feel in your body? Close your eyes next time you're in downward facing dog. Occasionally allow your sense of touch to guide your practice. It's certainly taught me to be a stronger, more inclusive teacher.

Natasha Baebler, RYT, Founder of UDYoga, is an individual with multiple disabilities, a Rehabilitation Counselor, and registered yoga teacher with Yoga Alliance. Through her practice, Natasha recognized barriers to full access. First physical, and later instructional. Teacher training programs discuss welcoming all students into class. Yet, few teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to provide a full yoga experience to all students. UDYoga advocates for all students of yoga regardless of what they bring to the mat. A student who uses a wheelchair should be able to have a full personal yoga experience in the same studio, the same class, and with the same teacher as a student who can sustain a complicated balancing pose. UDYoga is about opening yoga to anyone who wants to experience its benefits. This means breaking down physical barriers and ensuring yoga is offered in physically accessible spaces, opening minds, providing tools for yoga teachers to work with any student who enters their class, and helping students recognize that they if want to experience yoga there is a teacher willing to teach them. www.udforyoga.com

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ACCESSIBLE X 2

Patrice Priya Wagner

A growing number of people are joining together to embrace an adaptive style of yoga. This movement is called Accessible Yoga and welcomes all abilities, disabilities, sizes, shapes and backgrounds into the community – including the swirl of voices that surround and make up mainstream yoga.

In 1988, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), an unpredictable and often disabling disease that can impact movement, cause fatigue, and alter sensations in the body. Twenty years after this diagnosis, I was certified as an instructor for Integral Yoga in the first 200-hour Accessible Yoga Teacher Training. This training was created by Jivana Heyman to accommodate the needs of people with a disability or chronic illness. Attending a mainstream yoga training was impossible for me; 200 hours of curriculum in a one-month period of time was impossible given the severe fatigue I frequently experienced. The Accessible Yoga Teacher Training was designed for people like me; it stretched out over eight months, with three-hour classes held twice a week. I could certainly manage that.

Having a disability has shaped my experience of yoga from the very first class I took. As a student I didn't want to look different than other students. It took me months to use the chair that the instructor gently placed within my reach as I struggled to balance in

a standing pose. If my first instructor, JoAnn Lyons, had not intuited how headstrong I was about accepting help, who knows if I would have even continued with the practice of yoga.

Having a disability has impacted my teacher training, and advanced yoga studies. During Teacher Training, a voice of self-doubt whispered in my head, *"You don't look like a yoga teacher, especially when you sit in a chair to instruct. You don't even sound like a teacher."* I explained to myself that there is no requirement that a yoga teacher be or look like an able-bodied person. How does anyone know what a yoga teacher should sound like anyway? When I chanted, the nearby dogs howled along with me, so at least they thought I sounded yogic!

It was not long before my self-doubt dove deeper than external appearances. My muscles, tendons, and bones yelled at full volume, *"If you can't balance or bend as well as your students, how can you teach them?"* I replied that if I know how to teach with words that safely lead students into and out of a pose, it doesn't matter how well I can balance or bend. While I'm instructing, the focus is on my *students'* abilities.

Self-doubt dove deeper still - into my thoughts and emotions. Fortunately, self-doubt was met with a solid compassion that has been intricately woven into my mind and body. This tapestry of compassion is built from threads that were gathered over 28 years of living with increasing physical and cognitive challenges. Compassion shaped my journey and motivated me to observe, ask questions, and find the right

modification or prop that would help a student experience comfort in a pose.

After quieting the voice that doubted my ability to teach yoga, I successfully organized a class for people with disabilities. I became so confident in my ability that I joined the 2015 Planning Committee for the Accessible Yoga Conference. This conference was designed to expand the reach of adaptive yoga.

Now in my second year helping to organize this event, I am moderating a panel discussion

called "Accessible x2: When Teacher and Student Have a Disability." This panel provides a chance for teachers who have a disability to speak about the benefits and increased understanding that their disability brings to their yoga teaching. It will be an opportunity to share how they have dealt with challenging moments in the studio. My hope is that the audience can learn how to recognize the invisible symptoms of disability, and develop a

communication strategy that is mindful and inclusive.

The positive lessons that I have learned from MS serve as the foundation for the yoga class that I bring to others. When I teach to students with MS, I continually shift between the role of instructor and peer counselor. Teaching people with MS requires maintaining a delicate balance between time for students to talk about the disease we share and time for instructing poses, breathwork, and meditation.



Perhaps the most significant aspect of teaching yoga to those with disabilities is to create a balanced practice that favors the strengths of those in your class. It is imperative that we not create a struggle with

the symptoms of MS. Tipping the balance in favor of those with MS allows for a sense of mastery and success. Create a judo effect - employing the power of an unwanted force for a good purpose.

Patrice Priya Wagner, RYT, trained in Integral Yoga, Accessible Yoga, Gentle Yoga, and Raja Yoga, Rest and Renew Restorative Yoga. Priya has taught people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and currently leads a class for people with multiple sclerosis in Oakland, California where she lives.



REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Melanie Klein

Our worldview and self-development are impacted by many variables: family of origin, peers, educators, religious leaders, politicians, and the communities we are a part of. Those of us with the privilege of living in first world countries are exposed to an ever-expanding media landscape.

Media created images have become a central component that influences the identity of most Euro-Americans. Media created images and messages are ubiquitous - practically inescapable. Even individuals who try to curb their time spent engaging with media are bombarded by carefully crafted messages when they drive down the street, pump gas, or stand in the check-out line. It is not hard to see how media is one of the most, if not *the* most, significant influence on our worldview.

Representation matters. It is not only who is represented in the media that matters, but *how* and *how often*.

It is no secret that yoga publications largely mirror mainstream North American publications by primarily featuring a small margin of the population. Advertisements largely feature young, white women who are thin, flexible, toned, able-bodied, cisgender, heteronormative, and conventionally attractive. While these images only represent a fraction of the general population who practice yoga, they appear normal because they saturate the media landscape. Indeed, the norm of beauty standards is so deeply

ingrained in our culture that we have internalized the message; we take the images for granted and even expect them. As a result, these images shape our view of what yoga should be.

Make no mistake about it, the choice to focus on a singular norm to represent the yoga community is not benign. The choice marginalizes most members of the yoga community. Simultaneously, it reduces thin white women to a "beauty norm" that ignores their complexity as dynamic and engaged social beings. Indeed, the images we're inundated with in the pop culture version of yoga present us with an incredibly limited definition of both beauty and health. In fact, beauty and health are often confused, with some individuals making the choice to undermine their health in the pursuit of socially constructed notions of physical "perfection" and "health."

For the most part we, as cultural participants, do not reflect on or understand the extent to which media influences our sense of identity. Notions of who is beautiful and what constitutes health are rarely challenged. Culture is opaque so it is difficult for participants to see the ways in which media representation of yoga reflect and reinforce various forms of oppression.

There is nothing rebellious or revolutionary about replicating the same-old, tired stereotypes of who can and should represent yoga. What's bold and daring is creating something new, developing representations of yoga that are authentic, inclusive and equitable. Re-imagining the images we

use to represent the yoga community is an opportunity to raise the consciousness of our community. I believe the process of re-imagining has the potential to allow those in the yoga community to decolonize our minds, examine our own internalized beauty standards and work towards shifting the current paradigm about who and what yoga is for. Questioning the images used to represent yoga is about raising awareness about the diversity of people who benefit from this practice. Isn't raising awareness what a yoga practice is all about?

Occasionally featuring someone outside of the "norm" is tokenizing, insulting, and unacceptable because it fails to represent the authentic bodies who engage in the practice. The lack of authentic images is a shame because yoga is transformative and truly benefits a wide range of people. Unfortunately, the one-dimensional images propagated by the pop cultural representation of yoga may keep some people from beginning a yoga practice. Some people avoid yoga because they feel they are not _____ enough; they are intimidated by the very image meant to sell them yoga.

Let's get real. We can represent diversity in

mainstream yoga spaces, yoga conferences, and in the yoga imagery used in social media and advertising. If those who participate in North American yoga culture are truly a conscious community devoted to evolution and enlightenment, we can help each other to have a healthy dialogue about the way in which the popular media associated with yoga replicates sexism, able-ism, age-ism, heterosexism, size-ism, classism, and racism. This work requires dialogue. The work may be uncomfortable. As participants in the yoga community we do have the ability to consciously direct the culture of yoga, creating something powerful and real that reflects the uniqueness of each one of us just as we are.

Propelled by my deep love and appreciation for my practice as well as my community, the *Yoga and Body Image Coalition's* #whatayogilookslike media campaign was born. It has been an ongoing effort since 2014 to diversify media imagery by showcasing and filling the media landscape with a diverse array of yogis—bodies and faces not normally portrayed in popular yoga media.

This article is based on an earlier version originally written for *Yoga International*.

Melanie Klein is a professor of Sociology and Women's Studies. She attributes feminism and yoga as the two primary influences in her work. She is committed to communal collaboration, raising consciousness, media literacy education, facilitating the healing of distorted body images and promoting positive body relationships. She is the co-editor of *Yoga and Body Image: 25 Personal Stories About Beauty, Bravery and Loving Your Body* (Llewellyn, 2014) with Anna Guest - Jelley, a contributor in *21st Century Yoga: Culture, Politics and Practices* (Horton & Harvey, 2012), is featured in *Conversations with Modern Yogis* (Shroff, 2014), a featured writer in Llewellyn's *Complete Book of Mindful Living* (Llewellyn, 2016) and co-editor of the forthcoming anthology, *Yoga & the Body: An Intersectional Analysis of Contemporary Body Politics, Mindfulness & Embodied Social Change* with Dr. Beth Berila and Dr. Chelsea Jackson Roberts (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). www.ybicoalition.com, ybicoalition@gmail.com

YOGA BOSS

Jessica Rhodes



I am a yoga boss. Every day, my hands wrap delicately around my devotion, while my feet run a business. Now, I understand why yogis leave their lives to live in the mountains. Examining your mind seems infinitely more fruitful without the endless array of questions, demands and needs of the 150+ people in our business and the 10,000+ attendees. Working the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* is a darn blessed struggle.

Over the last five years, I have been the director of a non-profit yoga studio. We started with a handful of classes and a handful of unpaid and uninsured teachers; we now have over 232 classes per month, 35+ teachers who are covered under our workers' compensation and who have access to our health care plan. We have gone from start-up phase to a mid-sized business in a solid phase of growth.

This year, Jivana Heyman asked me to join the Accessible Yoga Conference to lead a panel on how to

grow a successful yoga business. I did what I always do, I reached out to all the other people I knew in the industry who are doing it better than I am. I reached out to Elle Potter from *Yoga Buzz*, Melanie Klein from *Yoga and Body Image Coalition*, Zack Pasillas and Jeanne Munoz from *The Yoga Seed*, Pranidhi Varshney from *Yoga Shala West*, Raja Michelle from *Green Tree Yoga Meditation Foundation*, and other kind folks from around the region. Not all could join for the conference, or were able to talk for all that long. What surprised me, however, was the frequency with which the same comments and questions arose.

Highlights from conversations with yoga bosses:

Be the Change You Wish to See

If the capitalist model doesn't fit the business you'd like to create, change it.

The yoga industry has a history of not protecting its workers. As emerging

leaders, we must stand up and be the change we wish to see by working toward health care, 401k plans, and excellent benefits for our employees.

Find and Trust the Experts

Human Resource Law in California is impossible to understand from Google. One mistake can sink your ship. Find the experts to review your practices.

Yogic business seems like an oxymoron. We often find dedicated yogis with little business background fighting to keep a studio running, or we find great business-people with little yogic knowledge, setting the tone of the industry. A perfect balance of these skill sets does not come from any one person. You will benefit from both.

Don't be a Jack-of-all-Trades for more than a year

Ask the people in your family who run their own businesses (of any kind) to look over your budget and forecasts. Get another person to be your teacher trainer.

Hire an accountant. Hire a studio manger. Ask for help. Burnout is a *pranic* disorder. It will happen, and your community will suffer if you do not prepare for it.

Build Your Team

Know your strengths, and find a team of others who have different strengths. This applies when finding team members as well as business partners and sponsors.

If you do not empower your team, your business will crumble

Firm boundaries are the key to freedom. This applies to yourself as well as to your staff, volunteers, employees, and clients.

Chart the Course

Looking five years ahead is the only way to make good decisions in the present.

Include key stakeholders when you set the five-year vision, or make sure you have their buy in before you order T-shirts with your new slogan on them.

Wave Your Flag

Marketing is necessary, and it can be done with yogic values. For example, check out the Dalai Lama's social media pages.

If you haven't gotten clear on what you will offer the world, marketing will be an endless race to promote one

event after another. Get clear on who you are as a teacher, and/or who you are as a studio, and state it clearly.

If you are interested in making yoga part of your life, your career, or you are seeking ways to inspire your community into action, join our panel at the Accessible Yoga Conference. I look forward to introducing you to a group of dedicated people who I consider mentors.

No matter where you are in your journey, you have something to learn and something to share. Continue this conversation with us post-conference at www.yogaboss.org.

Jessica Rhodes, eRYT-500, received her MBA in Non Profit Management from the University of Dallas and majored in humanities at the College of Letters at Wesleyan University. She is the co-author of the Yoga Seed Collective's (Sacramento) 200 & 300-hour curriculum, the founder of the All Bodies curriculum, a version of Accessible Yoga in Sacramento. After leading the Yoga Seed Collective to success as its Executive Director, she moved on to consult and support bold businesses making (or wanting to make) a big impact on the world. On a typical day, you'll find her leading a board retreat, building a strategic plan, executing honest marketing campaigns, and holding doors open for people on her way to take a class. <http://www.yogaboss.org>

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