

  
JANET LAU

## A True Passion for Yoga

### Leading to Joy & Happiness Within Making The World A Better Place

#### My path to peace and joy

Every time I met a new friend and as soon as they knew about my profession and my interest in yoga, they would ask if I am very flexible, and whether I am able to put my foot behind my head. From what we see on TV, YouTube, magazines, books, it seems that yoga is nothing more than a physical exercise. However, my answer to my new friends was always the same, "if you ask me one thing that yoga changed me, I would say it was the peace that I gained towards myself, those around me, and my life. Yes, I am a lot more flexible than when I started but that was not the biggest gain from the yoga practice." My friends were surprised by my answer and would like to understand how all the balancing, twisting, pretzel-like poses would lead me to peace and joy. This feeling is something that is difficult to understand with our heads unless we have a taste of it through our personal experience.

I must admit that yoga has given me a healthy body with a good balance of strength and flexibility but it has made my mind ten times more flexible than my body. I have transformed from being a black-and-white and rigid person to someone who is more receptive and open to the flow of life.

#### Beginning the yoga journey

Yoga was never something that I planned to try, because I had a perception that it was boring and slow. The only reason that brought me to my first yoga class was because one of my good friends were inviting me to join her and I just wanted to accompany her. Back then I enjoyed all kinds of sports that was exciting and dynamic, so yoga seemed very foreign to me. I was not interested after the first class, I thought it was too slow and focusing on the breath was simply not

interesting. However, I continue to accompany my friend just because I enjoyed her company.

My real interest in yoga did not start until my marketing job became more and more demanding. Working out in the gym was no longer helpful to channel my stress, so I went back to my yoga mat for a second try. This time, I found a style of yoga that was dynamic and challenging for me, and yet with a sense of ease and lightness that I had never experienced before, instantly I was hooked.

Flexibility did not come easy for me, neither did strength. Scanning across the room with flexible practitioners while I was in modified poses that looked nothing like others, I thought to myself, "I don't think I could ever be like them." Despite of the incompetence I felt, I was facilitated by the beauty of many poses (that others were doing) and I was striving very diligently towards the ideal postures.

I learned through the experience in my life that if I wanted to see results, I had to strive very hard towards the goal then it would lead me to a promising result. So naturally I applied the same mentality to my yoga practice. This militant approach to yoga did help me conquer some poses, however, it also brought about a very boastful and egotistic state as a byproduct. Because of this pride, I thought I could be able to do anything as long as my mind was set on the target, one time, I almost broke my neck in a yoga practice as a result. This incident humbled me a lot and I started to examine my way of practice and I started to rebuild my practice from the very foundation, the breath.

In the Bhagavad Gita, one of the original yogic texts, it teaches us to do our deeds without being attached to the fruits of the



results. The more I started to listen to my breath, the more I learned about my body and the more I started to respect my body, learning when to push and when to retrieve. Without realizing, my yoga practice began to shift my focus into learning how to flow with life. The more I allowed myself to dance with the state of my body, my yoga practice started to blossom like it had never been before. This was the first time I started to understand why we would gain more when we start to let go of our control.

#### Yoga and life

As time went by, I was able to attain more postures from the yoga repertoire, I started to lose the interest and passion that I used to have because it was no longer challenging for me. I wonder why attaining the beautiful and bendy poses did not give me the sense of peace that many teachers had described. I began to look deeper into the way I practice hoping to find out what went wrong with my approach. One day in a yoga class, the teacher encouraged us to apply the tools we learn from our yoga asana (asana means seat in Sanskrit, and it can also be understood as posture) practice to our lives. He said, "making your life as a yoga practice is the most difficult form of yoga but it will give you the most fruitful return." Since that day, I promised myself to pursue this style of yoga - using my life as my yoga practice.

I started to look into the parts of my life that were not working or stuck, which was my relationship with my father. I recognized how much resentment and anger I had towards him, which came from not receiving his approvals with everything I did. For a long time I observed my resentment and anger, trying to understand what went wrong. One day, I realized that it was my expectation of a perfect father that

disapproved my dad in the very beginning, and this expectation of an ideal father image backfired so I had a projection of not being appreciated by my father. When I finally saw how my perception had clouded my experience in life, thirty-years of tension between my father and I disappeared. This realization gave me a huge insight - yoga can actually be applied to our lives and liberates us!

With the accomplishment of releasing a heavy mental burden, it gave me tremendous strength to continue to look into other parts of my lives. I also began to have a clear direction in my yoga practice and teachings: if our yoga practice does not lead us to a better space within ourselves and amongst others, then we should examine our approach to yoga. Putting the foot behind our heads is interesting, but it won't make our lives joyful and peaceful for long. Only when we can cultivate more love and understanding to ourselves and others through yoga are we tapping into the true essence of the ancient yoga.

#### Deeper meaning

The yoga practice allowed me to understand that it cannot be forced by my will power, but learning when to engage and when to relax is the key. Taking things slowly gives me a better perspective and to allows me to respond in a way that preserves harmony and joy for myself and everything else around me. Rushing might take us somewhere in the short run, but it does tax our bodies and stirs up a lot of emotions which slows us down in the long run. The more we relax with reality, the more clarity we have and with this clarity, our decisions will guide us to a peaceful space further down the road. This is how yoga helped me with my life and it can also help you with your life.





When our minds are clouded by greed, aggression, and fear, we tend to act to avoid pain and suffering. However, acting out of fear does not allow us to be free inside. When we feel bounded and closed inside, the only way we can release our pain is to go after sensual pleasure. But chasing after sensual pleasure further binds us to work harder for a higher position in our lives so that we can buy more things; we are still running in circle with no way out. Only when we can tap into the inner joy in us will we be able to be our bigger self without being limited by our fear and anger.

Many of us are confused with happiness that comes from external things and the joy that comes from within. Here I would like to share with you a poem:

***Joy and happiness seem to be interchangeable but they are actually two different states.***

***Happiness is based on the physical body, but joy is based on our minds.***

***Happiness is conditioned to the external, and joy relies on the internal.***

***Joy is about being content with what is, but happiness is about what you have gained.***

***Happiness cannot co-exist with sadness, and joy can stand side by side with unfortunate events.***

***Happiness comes from intellectual knowledge, but joy comes from the insight seeing how the knowledge actually relates to our lives.***

***Joy can lead to ease and freedom, and happiness can easily turn into discontentment.***

***Happiness is short-lived, but joy can be long-lasting.***

***Happiness is easy to access, and joy takes time to cultivate.***

***With the right practice, happiness will turn into joy.***

#### **It all begins with you**

According to one of the ancient texts of yoga, The Yoga Sutras says that yoga asana is only one of the eight limbs of the real yoga practice. A regular practice of yoga postures facilitate a healthy body so that we can tap into the deeper meaning of the art of yoga. For those of you who have an asana practice, please keep up the good work but challenge yourself to go beyond the physical yoga to invite a real transformation in your daily experience. For those who are brand new to yoga, just try - for the sake of your body or mind; everyone starts somewhere. It is never too late for a yoga practice. There are various styles of yoga out there, give it some time to find one style that speaks to your heart and don't let your self judgment trick you from reaching to the other shore of liberation.

To be a true yoga practitioner is to leave our world a better place wherever we touched. **B**

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