

CHOOSING A YOGA TEACHER TRAINING/ADVANCED STUDY PROGRAM

Hatha Yoga classes have been increasingly available for some time now in the St. Louis area, resulting in many folks finding themselves committed to a regular, consistent practice. This has led them to consider the next step. Students fall in love with yoga and how it makes them feel, and they know they want to share it with others. Even with limited exposure to yoga, some folks are drawn to the prospect of advanced study and teaching for a variety of personal reasons.

Here in the St. Louis area teaching yoga and deepening one's study has become a viable event on the horizon of one's yoga practice. As with all important decisions, it is helpful to have clarity about intentions, directions, needs, and realistic concerns. A yoga student who is considering possibilities might ask herself the following:

1. Do I want to teach yoga? What is the personal fulfillment and personal gain?
2. Would I prefer to deepen my practice and explore the option of teaching as I learn more?
3. What style and what types of yoga appeal to me? What would be most appropriate for me to teach?
4. What are my time and financial considerations regarding taking a teaching/advanced studies program?

Along with the increasing number of yoga classes available around the St. Louis metropolitan area, there are also an increasing number of teacher training options that meet the 200-hour standards set by the National Yoga Alliance. They can be categorized as follows:

1. Advanced Study/Teacher Training with one teacher to whom the student has a close, long-term relationship, or who teaches a style or type of yoga that the student finds particularly appealing.
2. Long-term, periodic study with an out-of-town teacher who comes regularly to the area
3. Long-term, periodic study (on a monthly or quarterly basis) with an in-town teacher or teachers
4. Short-term intensive/immersion in yoga studies and lifestyle with a group faculty

The costs and benefits of teacher trainings and advanced studies vary. Choice of a program will depend on individual circumstances and preferences. Thus it is helpful to prioritize what is *most* important in making the decision. However, remember that the study of yoga, whether as a teacher or as a student, is a continuing, life-time process. All programs should have homework, self-study, and class attendance and observation requirements. It is strongly recommended that the prospective teacher weigh his options carefully. Take classes with at least one of the faculty members of the program, do background checks on the faculty, and talk to graduates of previous programs.

For the student who prefers to study with a teacher with whom she is very familiar the benefit is that there are few, if any, discrepancies in teaching methodology. There can be a very deep commitment to a particular way of practicing. The liability is that it can limit one's toolbox of skills and perspectives. The prospective teacher is in danger of becoming a parrot of the teacher, without developing an eye for looking clearly at students. The same is true with programs that teach a scripted style of yoga, where the practice is entirely repetitive without any changes allowed. On one hand this frees the teacher (and student) from having to consider the next posture and how to sequence the practice, but on the other hand, it severely limits techniques for adapting the practice to individual or current needs.

Studying with a group of teachers can expand one's practice and one's skill set as a teacher. The difficulty is that the prospective teacher may be faced with a barrage of opinions and ideas about how to perform or teach postures, breathing, etc., but this is typical of Hatha Yoga, which advocates many paths to one Truth and supports the individual finding her own path. A program with multiple teachers expands the knowledge base, since one faculty member is particularly suited to teaching postures,

methodology, and sequencing, while another is an expert on anatomy and physiology of yoga, and still another has in-depth knowledge of philosophy and ethics. It is recommended that one ask about background and training of the faculty to assess their level of expertise.

If the priority for choice of program is its cost and time commitment, then consider an in-depth, intensive program, where the participants immerse themselves for ten days in a yogic lifestyle. This kind of program supports students in community and allows them to remain focused and undistracted from their goals and studies. If the program has a group faculty sharing the burden of teaching and offers a mentoring program in conjunction with the intensive, this can be a rewarding, life-enriching experience. The downside of course is that a student must be able to devote ten or twelve consecutive days to the immersion part of the program.

Below is a list of teacher training/advanced study options in the St. Louis and St. Charles area. Adopting a yogic perspective of clarity and discrimination will guide one to the best choice.

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