

YOGA: PRACTICE CONSISTENTLY, OVER A LONG PERIOD, WITH DEVOTION

The New York Times recently ran an article called “Yoga is More Than Just Showing Up, But That Does Help” in its Thursday, September 6, 2007 Physical Culture section. The theme was that yoga needs to be practiced more than once or twice a week, and that many New York City studios are boosting attendance by offering specials on 21 to 30 days of consecutive classes. For prices like \$120 for three weeks or thirty days for \$30, students are encouraged to take classes with greater frequency. The result: students found that by committing to a regular, daily practice benefits were quickly and exponentially noticeable.

The article emphasized that studios are looking for ways to keep abreast of the stiff competition that is found in the yoga industry these days, and that they need to “create regulars out of monthly drop-ins.” However, it also made much of the fact that yoga, in order to be effective, needs to be practiced consistently and often, and over a long period of time. This has been known for centuries according to Book I Section 12 of the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, written sometime around 400 A.D. Although it is a recent phenomenon of American capitalist culture to support regular, consistent practice over long periods of time to bring more revenue to a studio, it may be something else that motivates studios to offer those deep discounts.

Actually the “dollar a day” incentives (and even \$6 classes) don’t do much to improve a studio’s income, the article points out. But what it does for the community perhaps cannot be measured in dollars and cents. A newcomer to yoga may be leery of coming more than once or twice a week. But watch out... the well-being, community connection, and self-acceptance that yoga classes engender can be habit-forming. Once a practitioner discovers that yoga improves their health and lowers their stress level, it behooves the studio to encourage increased attendance. A reasonable monthly fee can be readily incorporated into a student’s budget, and the person who discovers that she can’t live without her three to five times a week yoga class doesn’t have to. And once that person’s friends see her changing for the better, they too want to jump on the yoga bandwagon. More people doing more yoga might just add up to a kinder, more compassionate society – a benefit for everyone.

It is critical that students understand that yoga was designed to be practiced daily, but that not all practices work for all people on a daily basis. A very intense, athletic practice may result in sore muscles and stressed joints if done on every day by some students. Others may find that slow, meditative practice does not hold their attention. This is why a studio does well to offer a variety of classes; a reasonable regimen might include everything from Power Vinyasa to Restoratives, with a couple of moderate-level classes in between. A student can then choose which level or type of class best fits her needs, and then can consistently practice over a long period of time.

Yoga teachers often tout the benefits of daily practice, but they too must stay with it. In order to be present and accountable, and keep their healthy, positive outlook on life, teachers must keep to their scheduled personal practice. Studios do well to encourage this by allowing teachers to take each other’s classes free of charge. Even if a yoga teacher can’t take a class every day, (which is often the case due to the fact that most teachers are working at the times classes are offered), they can certainly practice on their own.

A daily home practice can be as short as twenty minutes and still be extremely effective. It may take some private lessons, an investment in a book, CD or DVD; there are many ways a student can keep to a consistent, regular practice that can last a lifetime. A yoga studio that has easy accessibility and has classes and teachers that are appropriate for one’s level of ability and experience, and creates a sense of community among its clients and offers affordable prices, can be a real asset to the student who wants to make a deep, life-long change for the better.