



## Confessions of a Yogaholic

Prior to yoga I was *the* aerobics queen of bayside Melbourne. Just name the gym or community aerobics class and I'd been there done that. And whereas most 20-somethings haunted nightclubs, my regular haunts were clubs like Recreation, Body World, or Kicks. Any venue, in fact, with a room large enough to hold a crowd of high-kicking side-stepping Jane Fonda wannabes.

Like a malingerer who doctor shops, I shopped with reckless abandon for the hardest, fastest, busiest class in town. None of this wimpy low impact stuff! I was a high-energy fuchsia-leotard kind of gal! And having intoned Oliva Newton John's 80s mantra, this was solely about getting physical.

It's perhaps not surprising that the intoxication derived from my first ever yoga class was its sheer physicality. For someone who'd grape-vined their way around Canberra, Melbourne and London, the wow factor of a total body workout in a sphere as long as a lunge and as wide as a wingspan was pretty damn enthralling.

**IN THAT FIRST EVER YOGA CLASS, IN** typical type-A style, I resolved to teach this thing called yoga. Like a co-dependent lover I simply transferred my passion to the new object of my desire. "Away with the queen," I declared, "come forward the guru within." Transferring the vigour and obsession of aerobics, I regularly attended five yoga classes a week. Within 18 months I'd signed up for teacher training.

Unfortunately I was naturally flexible and long of limb, propensities which allowed me to slip into stretches and arch into asanas for which I was neither mentally nor emotionally

prepared. My practice I treated like an opportune friendship: more than happy to participate, but on my terms, when I demanded, and most often to pass time. Busyness and doing yoga were antidotes to the feelings of loneliness, unworthiness and lack that threatened to engulf me – if ever I dared be still long enough to listen to their plaintive pangs and clangs.

**AS LIFE WILL HAVE IT, A LESSON NOT** heeded at the physical level will inevitably etch itself more deeply upon our being. And occasionally, if we're really pigheaded — or deeply afraid — it'll settle upon your soul.

Four years into my yoga journey, twelve months into my teacher training, my amazingly healthy, beautiful, flexible young body disappeared. What I got instead was one riddled with muscular pain (fibromyalgia) and laden with fatigue (chronic fatigue). Ironically, at the peak of my aerobics obsession I used to wonder what on earth I'd do if I couldn't exercise. And I'd chant to friends, "Why don't people with chronic fatigue just rest?". At times I've wondered if my health issues are simply the repressed feelings making their mark. I've contemplated too that the chronic aspect might be some kind of karmic retribution for half a lifetime of spiritual and inner disregard. But mostly now I see my body as a barometer for equilibrium; with pain and fatigue levels indicating how well or how poorly I've balanced my life in the previous few days. Old habits, you see, really do die hard.

When I trained to teach yoga the focus was strongly physical with headstands, handstands, scorpion, pigeon and full lotus being positions we aspired to achieve. I practise none of these now,

appreciative that the real magic of yoga lies in its subtlety. Or as my husband remarked leading up to the purchase of my wedding dress, "Perfection is reached not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

Nowadays I can feel the perfection inherent in a simple spinal twist performed with concentration. I can observe the innate benefits of a few cat stretches properly attuned to the breath. I can receive neck release from five minutes in Child's Pose and simultaneously comprehend the posture's (and my own) humility. And I can fully grasp the difference between yoga practice performed with and without conscious intent.

**FORTUNATELY, IN AN ERA OF SUSTAINABILITY,** my pain body forced me to stop teaching in an unsustainable way. My pain body also forced me to stop doing, to stop trying, to stop wanting, and to stop being someone other than me. In so doing, it forced me to simply be.

Being is what really lies at the heart of yoga. Through the physical aspects we are led toward being our best possible healthy self. Through the mental aspects we are guided toward being ever more mindful and aware. Through the breath we are stirred toward being at one with the ebb and flow of life. And through our spiritual practice we are steered toward being more completely, more absolutely, more functionally, and more irrevocably our own true self.

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