

The Privilege of Yoga – Notes

Summary notes from discussion groups at the April 26th dialogue at Rhizome Café. Please excuse any mistakes in translating notes from written to typed form.

Topic 1: Yoga and White Privilege/Heteronormativity

- Yoga as a tool for increased awareness and Character Development
- Yoga cultivating emotional intelligence
- Studios minimize emotions / don't feel there is permission not to feel good
- Yoga and a sense of sharing / purity / minimizing of individual expression
- Are smaller studios better able to invite a variety of expressions?
- Teachers responsibility to create a safe space that allows for complexity of expression
- Hurt, sit with discomfort, and create community
- Yoga is an opportunity to explore our own fallibility
- Authentic teachers vs a sense of purity
- Sell something different than the mainstream.
- Positive practice / not doing the work.
- Healing from pain, healing from addictions (especially eating disorders)
- Conformity is abuse
- As a teacher, yoga is informed by educational models
- Began teaching as a compliment to physical fitness
- Evolution of practice – moved from physicality to spiritual practice – journey of doing
- Financial requirements
- Importance of providing context – culture reinforces imbalance, what are external factors that perpetuate violence
- Instances of yoga projection onto students
- Importance of creating safe space for discomfort and complexity
- Teachers need to be aware of their use of power
- We are all struggling
- Courage to Teach resource – Parker Palmer



Topic 2: The Authenticity of Modern, Vancouver Yoga

- Educating ourselves about the colonial history of the practice
- Power and flow yoga brings people in
- Yoga as... pleasure. A “fix”. A distraction. Performance.
- As a teacher, being authentic. Teaching from your own experience.
- Tracing back to a lineage – where does “vinyasa power flow” come from?
- What you need, what feeds you, changes over time.
- Slowness makes people uncomfortable, trying to balance what people want.
- Opportunity to connect to your physical experience is essential to connecting to everything else.
- Certain styles don't facilitate connection, feeling emotions, physical experience.

Topic 3: Capitalism

- Is studio space necessary?
- “Lifestyle” yoga
- Ethical + business = ?
- “Big Box Yoga” and “The Yoga Factory”
- What does sustainability look like for teachers? For businesses?
- Alternative ways to pay
- Moving toward a system where healing and preventative practices like yoga are included in healthcare – systemic changes needed
- Sharing the costs and profits – in a business model and/or as a larger society
- Celebrity culture / fame. A need to develop a following, in order to make the job of teaching sustainable. But it’s such an awful game to have to play.
- Cult of Personality vs... innovation?
- Competition
- Alternative to “guru” or “1 person teacher” – education more broadly / power dynamics
- Cost of teacher training a barrier – impacts who teaches
- Yoga philosophy vs capitalist philosophy

Topic 4: Yoga and Accessibility

Personal Experience:

- Accessibility = ? Money? Something else?
- As a teacher – are my classes accessible?
- Who is yoga not accessible for?
 - o Idea that you have to be fit
 - o Focus on asana and expectations based on appearance
 - o Caucasians teaching something with an Indian background? To what extent is it authentic?
 - o Issues based on assumptions of what ‘femininity’ is...
 - o Men – uncomfortable? Still a minority in many cases

How can we be doing this better?

- Talk about your own experience – articulate past – break illusion that teachers carry and expose shadows!
- Make yoga real and relatable
- When teaching – don’t perform full pose (attached to ego?). Don’t show off unnecessarily
- Responsibility on us to open up the yoga world – minimize backlash against minorities, disabilities, ect
- Create initiatives to increase accessibility
- Receive education from those groups you want to better understand
- Bridge Indian community and yoga studios as they currently exist
- Where we practice – give feedback regarding these issues. Not feeling safe, language issues, ect.
- By donation classes at studios – manage these better. Always serving students with new teachers?