



What I've learnt

You benefit from your yoga teacher's guidance in class but it can also be helpful to hear their personal yoga journeys. Here, five teachers share what they've learnt on the path.

Words Kate Duncan



PERSIA JULIET

Sydney, Australia

What insights have you gained while teaching yoga? The biggest and most personal insight I've gained is that it's not all about me! Before teaching and even during the first few years, I would take other people's emotions, opinions or experiences very personally. I would often feel anxious and expend energy trying to fix things or be a caretaker to people who shared issues. Now, when teaching, I experience global themes that connect us all as a people. I've learnt emotions are indicators and wonderful stress-release valves but they do not define a person or a situation.

What are some of your tips for aspiring yoga teachers? I love the analogy my first singing teacher gave me: learn the original lines, learn the song and, when you know it like it's your own, it's time to break away and freestyle. In translation, enquire as to the roots of where this practice was birthed. Answer the question, "Why do you

want to teach?" with a vision bigger than yourself. Once you have those answers, everything else is knowledge informed by experience on the mat and in the room.

What are your tips for overcoming emotions during or after class? I'd like to suggest that, by overcoming our emotions, we're losing energy. Emotions are a language. Rather, acknowledge what you're feeling instead of resisting or trying to shift out of it. I've been working with this approach for the past year and it's dissolving my stress levels and reactive tendencies. I enjoy taking a moment to listen when I'm in this experience because listening enhances empathy for others, builds greater connection and creates a deeper sense of ease.

How do you live yoga daily? I do my best to see myself in everyone and ultimately believe in non-separation. Sometimes it's a challenge to maintain this ideal with the characters we meet in our lives. Meditating twice daily has become my medicine and supports a return to present-moment awareness. This, combined with the physical yoga practice, maintains a connection with our bodies, our environment and the land we live on. If we take time daily to connect to and love ourselves, perhaps we can create a world that connects to and loves its planet.

Persia Juliet teaches from the heart and her classes differ according to the lunar cycle, season, group or sentiment of the day. With deep respect to safe alignment and intelligent sequencing, her passion in teaching leans more to the psychology and energetic anatomy of the practitioner.



DANA DIAMENT

Byron Bay, Australia

What insights have you gained while teaching yoga? I've seen many practitioners (myself included) set unhealthy expectations of how their yoga practice should look and feel. Of course, we want to put in a sincere effort, but it seems to me that the harder we are on ourselves, the less benefit we derive. Rather, when we practise from compassion, our potential for transformation is limitless. We discover a gentle kind of strength that fosters our patience, allowing the practice to unfold in its own timeline. My hope is that this longevity we create in our practice

sustains our yoga as the source of healing, grounding, inspiration — whatever reason it is that you practice — for many, many years.

What are some of your tips for aspiring yoga teachers?

Dive in. Listen to that voice within, the one speaking to you now, which says, “I want to teach yoga.” Find a quality 200-hour teacher training program and sign up. Throw away all of the reasons why you’re not ready and dive right in. Your practice doesn’t need to be advanced, beautiful or perfect. You don’t need to know everything before you start because the learning never stops. You’re not too old or too young — there will be students for you. Start teaching (even before you finish your 200 hours) to your friends and family, and, most importantly, be yourself.

What are your tips for overcoming emotions during or after class?

Yoga illuminates the habitual patterns in our lives. When we start doing the real work of paying attention, we’re bound to get emotional and feel things such as anger, shame, grief or sadness. Firstly, recognise the emotion, “Oh yeah, there’s anger again.” Then, be still and observe the emotion. To do this, you might skip a *chaturanga* or pass on the ice cream later that night. Notice if the emotion changes when you pay attention to it versus ignoring it. Often, mindfulness alone can help it dissipate. Also, never underestimate how good it feels to have a little cry in *savasana* (no one’s looking anyway).

How do you live yoga daily? My daily yoga is to be the kindest human I can be with my partner, family, friends, students, colleagues and my dog. To say, “I’m sorry,” when I’ve overreacted and truly listen to the other person’s point of view. To find positive things to say rather than complain. To take care of my health and contribute to taking care of the planet so that I can

continue to enjoy this one precious life. To recognise that some days are hard and dark, but they lead us to warmth and light.

Dana Diament teaches at Creature Yoga in Byron Bay, NSW. She writes about yoga and anatomy for Yoga Medicine and assists well-known yoga teacher Tiffany Cruikshank at trainings worldwide.



MARK MORFORD
San Francisco, US

How do you overcome emotions during or after class?

You don’t. You sit with it and feel it fully, all the way in, all the ways it might want to mess with you, delight you, taunt your heart or memories. And, maybe, depending on the emotion, your constitution and your skill with *samskara* (mental imprints) and energy release, you work to locate its source. Then you let it run roughshod over you for a short time, before breathing it through. Emotions are rarely to be trusted. They are just thought-forms, manifesting as bodily sensations or nervous-system excitement. They are “real” only insofar as you feel them, for a short while, until they recede and mutate again. But they contain no truth. They are not markers of actual knowing. They can only point to something that might — but not always — be worth examining further. They can only indicate, not reveal. You do not overcome them. You allow them, with practice, all the way in, through and out.

How do you live yoga daily?

My yoga is spontaneous, after all these years. Automatic. Yoga swarms my blood,

interpenetrates my bones, licks my toes...

It’s all I’m able to breathe anymore, or care to. You begin to recognise — as you continuously practise to align with — the radical, wildly nonlinear, divine heart in all things, most notably in yourself. You will walk down the street or stumble through the airport or crash around the grocery store and you will suddenly stop dead in your tracks, momentarily overtaken by a bizarre and dizzying swarm of awe, intercut with reverence, shot through with this vast and impossible ... spaciousness, made of nothing your feeble mind can grasp — much to its whiny chagrin. And then, the fatal turn: those moments begin to expand, widen, take over your entire life. And then you’re done for. Yoga is thoroughly awesome, except when it’s the hardest thing you will ever do.

One of San Francisco’s premier yoga instructors and most provocative writers, Mark Morford has been teaching yoga in San Francisco and around the world since 1999.



KIA MILLER
Santa Monica, US

What insights have you gained while teaching yoga?

One key thing I have learnt throughout my teaching is how to get out of my own way. One of the mantras in kundalini yoga is, “I am not a woman, I am not a man, I am not a person, I am not myself, I am a teacher.” This sums up what it means to teach — that is, we have to surrender our ego, our personality, our likes and dislikes, whatever has occurred to us that day or week. We

show up to communicate to the hearts and souls of whoever shows up in class. To me, this is the difference between teaching from my heart versus my head. My head is ego driven, my heart is not. My heart only cares that I teach in a way that uplifts and elevates the students and that helps them connect with their own heart and soul.

What are some of your tips for aspiring yoga teachers? Do you own personal practice every single day. Consider it the most important part of your day. What often happens with young teachers is that they take on so many classes that they end up sacrificing their own practice. This isn't sustainable and is a way that many people burn out and lose their passion and purpose. Keep practising, keep studying. There is always more to learn. Start meditating because it's the best way to know yourself and, in doing so, you'll understand what motivates you and create a conscious relationship with your mind. The *asana* practice is great, but our teaching naturally deepens when we start to meditate.

What are your tips for overcoming emotions during or after class? There are many yogic breath techniques (*pranayama*) that help process emotions and re-establish a neutral and calm place. The most basic and most powerful is taking a long, deep breath. By consciously regulating the breath, we begin to shift our brainwave state, calm the nervous system and create space from the thoughts and emotions that are causing disturbance.

How do you live yoga daily? My life is yoga. Yoga means union: union of mind, body and spirit; union of small, finite, egoist self with universal or higher self. How I live yoga daily is to remember that union, and to seek to create balance and ease. I watch my thoughts, my words and actions: how are they affecting my

consciousness and those around me. I take care of my physical body, what and where I eat. I watch the company I keep and know that consciousness is contagious. I practice *asana* and meditation daily. Yoga is love. *Celebrated yoga teacher Kia Miller has an ability to translate the subtle teachings of kundalini yoga in a highly accessible way. She teaches workshops, retreats and teacher trainings throughout the world.*



EMILIE PERZ
Los Angeles, US

What insights have you gained while teaching yoga? That, above all things, you must hold space for every single person who walks into your class. As teachers, we create the setting in which students want to learn, engage and experience yoga. It's important that students feel safe with our demeanour, speech and action and know that they are in a safe place with unconditional support. That's how you gain mutual trust and respect. Through trust, you lead by example and become the leader you want to be, providing your knowledge in a way that elevates your community.

What are some of your tips for aspiring yoga teachers? Be an example of yoga by being a dedicated yoga student. People can absolutely feel when a teacher is rooted and grounded in their own personal practice or when they are simply preaching from a place of inauthenticity. One of the most important things my teacher said to me was that you should

never tell someone how they should feel in yoga. Simply provide them the space to experience it for themselves. Let them have their own journey and guide them towards actions that can lead them deeper in it. But, most importantly, be kind, sincere and appreciative of their efforts.

What are your tips for overcoming emotions during or after class?

Be real with yourself and see if you are living in the moment. Often, emotions arise because you are reminded of or jolted to a past experience that brought up similar feelings. Recognising where those emotions are coming from is key to being able to ride the ebb and flow of teaching. Also, we are there to take on people's energy, so learn ways to release it. A meditation prior to class or a silent walk afterwards can be positive ways to get grounded and let go. It is inevitable that you will take on emotions, but it's up to you if you want to carry those around.

How do you live yoga daily? In the formative years of my practice, it was *asana*. I would practise for hours a day to get my dose of yoga and to become "better" at the postures. Now, yoga has such a different meaning in my life. I live it first and foremost by practising *ahimsa*, being kind to myself. The biggest lesson I've learnt from my practice is that I should treat myself the way I treat everyone else. Connecting to my own strengths, weaknesses and vulnerability has enabled me to connect to the hearts of others. Connecting to others wholeheartedly is how I live yoga on a daily basis.

Emilie Perz is known for her strong, creative and educational vinyasa flow classes. Her detail-oriented teachings reveal how yoga asana mirrors the practical movements we make in life and how learning to align the body precisely can create energy and equanimity in the body and mind. ♻