



Personal Practice & Study + Embracing Suffering

Description

Questions Answered Here

Here we offer deeper inspiration related to your personal practice and study. For an introduction to this vital topic, see our coverage in Art of Teachings Fundamentals [here](#). For inspiration related to teaching as differentiated from personal practice, see [here](#).

1. In what specific ways does personal practice help you to take care of yourself?
2. What are some reasons that personal practice is vital for good teaching?
3. Describe how the myth of perfection may show up and why, instead, personal challenges can be welcomed and useful.
4. Why is it critical that yoga teachers investigate our “wounds”?
5. How can you experience improvement and “breakthroughs” both personally and professionally?
6. What are some common reasons for a home practice to fail?
7. How can you overcome the obstacles to practice?

A Way to Take Care of Yourself



1. Practice becomes your teacher.
2. Practice can prevent future suffering. And it is of vital support when facing challenge.
3. It fills your â??seeking cupâ?• on a daily basis.
4. And it is a primary way to learn about yourself. Itâ??s key to meeting your needs and maturing as a person and teacher.
5. Practice is the very path to your potential, to the mystical, to transcendence and to bliss.
6. Yoga, we remember, is not a belief system; itâ??s a practice and a state.
7. You cannot serve others if you do not first serve yourself.

Practice is Time to Take Care of Yourself



Your practice is time to take care of yourself, not prove yourself. â?? Jason Crandell

Your Practice Becomes Your Teacher

Your practice becomes your teacher. Without a practice, you never really discover yogaâ??youâ??ll get a lot of information, but youâ??ll never know yoga. As a teacher, without a personal practice, you are living from and teaching from only twenty-five percent of the knowledge available from yoga, and youâ??ll never be a great teacher; you can only be good. â?? Shari Friedrichsen

It Can Save You

The importance of developing your own personal connection to your spiritual practice cannot be underestimated. It can literally save you from lifeâ??s greatest challenges. It creates palpable magic in your everyday mystical experienceâ?|. A personal practice doesnâ??t seem as important when things are going smoothly in life, but itâ??s essential when we hit bumps in the road. Our consistency, no matter what lifeâ??s conditions, is what can make or break us when we desperately need spiritual support. Connecting to our bliss doesnâ??t have to be a random event. It can be our new normal. â?? Alanna Kaivalya

Fulfill Your Seeking

Stay ahead of the game of seeking. We cannot serve others if we do not fill our own â??seeking cupâ?• on a daily basis. We canâ??t. The line is too thin. The ice is too thin. If even a little bit of time goes by, and we ignore itâ?| we fall through the ice. Personal practice. Personal practice. Personal practice. A yogi who does not do sadhana (practice) is an actor; a parrotâ?| a bird whoâ??s memorized some words. Your well that you draw on has to be filledâ?| and not personal practice to the point of only giving you just enough to get byâ?| thatâ??s not filling your cup. Itâ??s not about maintenance. Itâ??s about fulfilling your seeking. That should be your primary focus. â?? Rod Stryker

See Also

- [Self-Care & Burnout](#)
- [What is Yoga?](#)
- [Yoga as Union & Joining](#)

What Youâ??re Transmitting



Personal practice and self-study are vital to a teacher's impact because teaching is not just a sharing of information. Teaching is a sharing of yourself: your accumulation of experience, your way of life, and a transmission of your energy.

It is said that a teacher can lead a student only as far as she has gone herself. Clearly, a teacher who hasn't experienced deep meditation, post-*pranayama* bliss, or a state of equanimity as a result of practice will not be able to adequately express these things. A teacher who struggled for years to master Handstand away from the wall will have some special insights into what it takes to accomplish this. Similarly, a teacher who has experienced chronic low back pain will have a depth of understanding that someone who has not experienced it may never have. *

** Note: While we note this vital point on the importance of a teacher's personal practice, we would feel remiss if we didn't also note that direct experience is not enough to be able to teach, nor is it a strict requirement. That is, practice alone doesn't make a good teacher: being good at handstands isn't enough to be a good teacher of handstands. Nor is direct practice required to teach something well: there are people, for example, who can coach elite athletes to accomplish what they themselves never have. Similarly, a yoga teacher who can't enter a Handstand away from the wall, or who hasn't experienced chronic low back pain can immerse herself in the related topics and through study and care, learn to expertly guide students. We would propose that without personal experience, it may take particular effort to become highly skilled, but the point here is that there are two sides to the coin of "Teach what you know." •*



Practice Leads to a High Vibration

Teaching yoga is not merely about conveying intellectual information or guiding students through physical practices. Those are good things to do, but the real impact comes through transmission of a high vibration. And for that, we ourselves need to have a high vibration, which is going to come only through our own deep personal practice and living the teachings. Then students will feel it in their hearts, and that's when great things begin to happen. — Nayaswami Gyandev McCord

More on Transmission

What makes a teaching transformational? Sometimes you listen to a teacher and, while what they say makes sense, it doesn't move you. Another teacher might say the same thing and it's like lightning — brilliantly illuminating the mind and piercing the heart. Same words. Totally different impact. Why? Transmission teachings connect you directly with: The innate wisdom of your soul; The boundless radiance of your spirit; The sacred nature of your life. — Eric Klein

See more: [Art of Teaching Fundamentals: Transmission & Levels of Teaching.](#)

Can Lead Only as Far as She Has Gone

What is being taught is a state of being, a way of living, which by necessity is intrinsic to the character of the teacher. In the study of yoga, the teacher can lead the student only as far as she has gone herself. Yet the teacher will undoubtedly fail at times; this is part of being human. What is most important is that the teacher has a sincere aspiration and deep commitment to the ethical precepts. If we profess to be teaching yoga, which is a science and art of living, we must practice that way of living ourselves. If we wish only to teach poses or postures, it would be better to call what we do by a name other than yoga. — Donna Farhi

Your Suffering, Shadow, Wounds



- “Students deserve a teacher who too has suffered.”
- Hala Khouri describes the premise that she and her co-teachers in Off the Mat teach with great skill: by becoming aware of our shadow and continuously investigating and airing our wounds, we are less likely to have them unconsciously seep out or drive our behavior.
- And we also get the magical gift of seeing how our “wounds are the source of our gifts.”

The Value of a Teacher Who Has Suffered

The truth is that most students need and want more from us than teaching poses, reading poems or talking about the Yamas and Niyamas. They deserve an educator who not only knows about the workings of their bodies but who too has suffered (yes, I said suffered) continual transformation and who can demonstrate that one can survive and thrive. “ Bettelynn Mcilvain

If We Don’t Investigate our Wounds, They Will Get in the Way

Our wounds are often the source of our gifts, and if we don’t investigate our wounds, they will get in the way.” This is particularly important for those who hold space for others to be vulnerable. It is our

responsibility to do our personal work, otherwise, we can cause harm to those who are trusting us with their bodies, minds and hearts. We all have a shadow side; no one is exempt from pain or trauma. If you teach yoga or hold space for others in any way, it is vital that you have a space that someone else is holding for you—a space where you get vulnerable and are seen; a space where you are held accountable and get nurtured in a compassionate way; a space where you can shed the teacher role and receive. This way you can be empathetic not enmeshed, supportive not diminishing, empowered rather than oppressive and compassionate rather than needy. — Hala Khouri

See also: [Feeding Your Passion to Teach: When You're Struggling or Failing](#)

Overcoming Obstacles to Practice



What is the way to improvement and breakthroughs—both personally and professionally?

- Practice.

What are some common reasons for a home practice to fail?



- Not prioritizing practice.
- Assuming practice must be a specific length or type.
- Not creating a practice that is satisfying.

What can overcome these obstacles?

- Develop the emotional stamina to practice no matter if your mood shifts or you're having a bad day.
- Expand your definition of practice.
- Continuously adapt practice to meet your needs.

Practicing Our Way to Breakthroughs

We've seduced ourselves into believing that breakthroughs spring forth fully formed, as Athena did from Zeus's head. Alas, that's a myth. What always happens (as you can discover by looking at the early work of anyone you admire), is that she practiced her way into it. — Seth Godin

What Causes Home Practice to Fail?

Students and teachers normally fall off the home practice wagon when they can't create the time for the practice and when the practice isn't satisfying. You may not have two hours to practice and that is just fine. It does not make you less of a yogi!! Throw out the illusion that practices need to be at least 75 or 90 minutes long. You know your schedule best. Each day has a different practice length with a modified sequence according to the time you have scheduled. Schedule your practice and yes, set your alarm. — Allison Schleck

When You're Having a Rough Day

*What do you do when you're having a rough day? Maybe it starts the moment you wake up and you just don't feel like doing your normal things? Or maybe it kicks in a little later in the day after a disappointment. Things aren't going your way. What do you do? Well, here's a key lesson: We've gotta develop our emotional stamina on those days when we feel the WORST, we need to be the MOST committed to rockin' our fundamentals. Imagine that you are MOST committed to doing the little things you *know* keep you plugged in when you LEAST feel like it. — Brian Johnson*

Planning for What You'll Need

I like to think about when I'll have time to practice, but over the years, I've found that tuning into the kind of support I'll need is even more important. For example, if it's a packed week, I know I need to make extra sure I practice so that I can stay grounded. But I also know I'll have less time. So I might consider how I can fit in a few minutes in the morning or before bed. There are all kinds of amalgamations of that, but I think it's something that can be really helpful — not just how much you can do, but what you actually need. — Anna Guest-Jelly

Expanding the Definition & Shape of Practice

Nowhere in the yoga texts does it say we need to do any of that within the parameters of a 24" X 68" rectangle. Despite that, yoga lovers are extremely committed to that rectangle. We pamper our mats, buy them fancy bags and carry them around with us, and we feel most alive when we're on them. This devotion to our practice on a rigid shape, leads us to orient all our movement on our frontal plane. We sometimes move our arms around a bit, but we largely confine ourselves to moving forward and backwards only. What if yoga didn't have to be that way? What if we challenged ourselves to create embodied movement in every orientation? Breaking out of this rectangle is one of the reasons that I'm such a huge fan of aqua yoga. — Christa Fairbrother

See also [Feeding Your Passion & Inspiration to Teach](#)

Study of Self & Teachings



Amy Ippoliti offers 8 qualities she believes are key to teaching yoga well. You may wish to use these as a way to go inward to study your strengths and weaknesses.

Do You Have These 8 Qualities of Excellent Yoga Teachers?



Be honest with yourself as you ask whether these are qualities you possess. Do you ____

- 1. Identify as a student of yoga in all areas of your life—?not just on the mat?*
- 2. Embrace an attitude of being continually open to learning and being able to admit when you don't know something?*
- 3. Possess a fundamental understanding of your own energy and a sensitivity to other people's boundaries?*
- 4. Have a daily practice?*

See also [Self-Inquiry & Your Sacred Mission & Vision](#) where we support you in the vital practice of internal dialogue.

Continuous Study of the Teachings

Anyone who's completed a basic 200 hour teacher training knows, that you're only scratching the surface. In order to become the best teacher possible, we must become more than just a yoga instructor. We must embody spiritual leadership, fully grasp anatomy and movement, and be able to tie in the philosophy of yoga into the experience of the practice. Not to mention, have the aptitude to intelligently sequence, build a relevant playlist, and tie in meditation. As more-than-yoga-instructors, we provide a space for community to our students that they may not find anywhere else! Teaching yoga is far bigger than asana. — Alanna Kaivalya

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