

Dear Teacher

I feel as though I am really struggling with yoga and when I mentioned this to a friend, they asked me why I am even bothering, as it doesn't seem like I am enjoying it.

I am now questioning why I come to class. When I look around it seems like everyone is struggling or pushing, I wonder if anyone is experiencing any relaxation or peace in the poses.

I would appreciate your thoughts.

Student

Dear Student

I can't give you the answers to your questions. But the questions are worth exploring.

Why are you doing yoga?

Why are you coming to my classes?

What do you think yoga "should" be? This one is really important, because it is very human to come to yoga with preconceptions of how we think it should be. Especially since everyone has an opinion and tells us what they think.

I don't want the answers. The answers are for you, not for me. The answers are for you to make decisions so that you are comfortable with what you are doing.

A big thing that people think yoga should be is that it "should" be relaxing.

Why should it be anything? And you know what? it will probably NEVER be what we think it should.

I have had to come to terms with this myself. I remember saying to myself as I struggled with a pose "this isn't yoga - yoga should be relaxing, I shouldn't be struggling this much." Oh really, should it? Shouldn't I? Who says so? Is it possible that I could just let the pose come to me as it does... warts and all and learn to accept and be in the moment? Actually live in life the way it comes to me in this moment?

Could I actually just give in to it? Let go. Surrender. You know, those yoga words that teachers bandy about...

Is it possible for me to stop resisting it and rejecting it? Could I cheer myself on for even being there in the first place?

And of course we have expectations of what we "should" be able to do, especially since Ms. Bendy Back next to us can do this and that. Then there is Mr. Abs of Steel over there, scrunching up his face and huffing and puffing as he lifts 75+ kilos of body off of the floor. Man, that dude needs to RELAX. :)

Every person has his or her areas of challenge. Some people find it very difficult to be in child pose. Every pose requires a different amount of effort. And each person needs to apply a different amount of effort (and release) to be in the same pose depending on what they have going on within them.

Coming to a class where a teacher actually gives instructions and corrections, probably isn't going to be as relaxing as we imagine, because all of a sudden they are telling us to do 6 different things. So we get a bit tense as we try to do them all... oh and remember to breathe and all that other stuff, bandhas and drishti and union and... and... and...

This is one of the reasons why self-practice is so important, so we can actually spend some time doing the poses without the 101 instructions that go with it. So we can go at the poses at our own pace, stay in them with our own breath and energy. So we can actually connect a little deeper. So we can find the balance that is effortless effort. So we can find the stillness amidst the storm.

It is so important that I even put a class on the schedule so people could practice at their own pace - the Mysore class on Sunday.

Today, a student came to the Mysore class, an older student - about 67 I think she is. She practices the General (foundation) level, and struggles with it. She has been doing General level for a little over 6 months now. Today, she wasn't feeling so good so she chose to do the Beginners Syllabus (great thing about Mysore class - you can actually choose). At the end of the practice she commented that she really became aware today of just how much she couldn't do 18 months ago, how 18 months ago, the Beginners level was such a struggle, and today, even though it required effort she was really aware of how far she has actually come.

I do have some final observations and suggestions - you seem to be doing a lot of thinking. Thinking about how you feel, thinking about how other people feel, thinking about what yoga should be. A suggestion - perhaps easier said than done: try just being in the class, just being in the pose. Just being in the instructions and the corrections, and the struggle and the joy and the rest and the effort and the swirl and the dance and the stillness and the peace.

It doesn't have to be anything. And then maybe, just maybe, it might be relaxing. Or not. Who knows?

Teacher