

## **Learning Yoga vs. Doing Yoga**

**I**t seems to me that yoga teachers are often torn between two agendas. On one hand, yoga is experiential in nature and therefore I feel I should be creating an atmosphere in which one might have a first hand experience of yoga. In such classes it is important to recognize and honour the “flow” of the class by sequencing postures in such a way that students are invited on a guided adventure into their own bodies and minds. On the other hand, yoga is a subtle science and each body has its own limitations, gifts, and quirks that need to be discovered, understood, and integrated in order to fully experience the amazing potential that yoga brings. These classes need to move slowly and methodically, pausing frequently to ensure that every student has absorbed one crucial instruction prior to moving on to the next.

Some teachers excel in creating a yoga-rich environment, literally helping to manifest yogic experiences for their students. Some teachers specialize in instruction and pride themselves on imbuing their students with the maximum information their bodies and minds are able to process. Teachers who are able to induce the experience of yoga in their students make for wonderful friends and enjoy people to practice with; however it seems to me that learning yoga is something best done with a teacher while doing yoga is something best done by one’s self.

The role of the teacher in yoga is not a simple one. The yoga teacher is a keen set of eyes, a repository of techniques and variations, a motivator, a friend, a fellow seeker, and (hopefully) a reliable source of yogic insight. The primary role of the teacher, though, is to teach. One should learn while in the company of teachers. That means, as a student, while in class you should keep your eyes and ears open. Don’t drift off into your own personal, blissful space in the midst of your fellow students. You are there to learn yoga, not to do yoga.

After class, perhaps later that day or later that week, one should actually begin to apply some of the things learned in class in your own practice. That is to say, one should start doing yoga. You don’t necessarily have to be alone (although many people find that is the easiest way to practice free from distraction), but when you are doing yoga you should be listening internally and moving from your heart. You should free yourself from commands (ie. “tighten your thighs!”) and engage your own intuitive source of yogic wisdom. That does not mean just do whatever feels right.

You are still doing what you have been learning in class – but on your own time and according to your own inclination.

There is nothing wrong with yoga classes in which students are invited to move their awareness inwardly and create a “doing yoga” attitude. Such classes serve a valuable role for students who don’t have the time and/or motivation to consistently practice yoga at home. But for earnest students of yoga, one should be learning yoga in class and doing yoga at home. It is for that very reason that the Bodhi Tree doesn’t often run “unlimited” style classes in which students are encouraged to come as often as possible. We want to encourage a learning environment where students are supported in the cultivation of their own yoga practice. Because it is that yoga practice – your own yoga practice – that will be a source of strength and solace in your most difficult hours.