

Yoga: Bored, Angry and Annoyed

I started doing yoga in an attempt to portray the woman in the picture. You know... the one sitting in the sand, beautiful and at peace. She represented what it would be like to have everything under control, dedicated to personal growth, healthful living and rewarded by perpetual vacationing.

My first yoga class was at 24 hour fitness. I didn't stay for the whole class because I was:

Bored. We weren't moving fast enough.

Angry. What I thought would be fluid and easy, felt like trying to swim in the ocean with a full body cast and yet I wasn't really *doing* anything.

Annoyed. If I can run seven miles through a forest, then this should be a breeze. Speaking of breeze, why are people breathing like Darth Vader?

This first experience with yoga deeply troubled me. I was supposed to find union of the body, mind and spirit. I was supposed to do it that day.

The second class, I left even earlier. I was defeated by yoga....or maybe, the teacher is all wrong. I didn't like her voice. Her body didn't really reflect what I thought a yoga body should, and she wasn't wearing the proper yoga attire. Definitely all wrong.

I visited the idea of me being all wrong, but left that class early too.

The truth is, I've never been receptive to being told what to do. I hate confined spaces. I prefer being good at something right away, and when I'm not, I tend to pout. Instructions, directions and examples are not my thing and I'm either moving or asleep, but never still.

Next class I took was in a yoga studio with, by accident, one of the toughest teachers in town. Straight out of the gate I had some problems with him...his shorts; too small, his mandatory hugs upon entering and exiting; too close. Somewhere along the way, I fell under the impression that all yoga instructors were soft spoken, angel faced women who urged you into being more wonderful. This guy was loud, strict and eager to get started on my complete recovery from being lame. But, passionate people intrigue me, so I signed in. Sitting on my mat, I knew there would be no sneaking out early, no skipping poses that weren't to my liking and no faking, cheating, whining, excuse making or giggling at inappropriate times.

"Is that who I am working with here?" I thought, "Am I a whining, cheating, excuse making immature person? No wonder my life is not a perpetual vacation. Let the self awareness begin. I hate yoga."

What I was about to experience was more challenging than any physical activity I had ever done. By the middle of class I was dripping in sweat and no feeling of beauty, peace or control was visiting my person. I did, however, find the connection between my inflexible body and my

inflexible mind. And I fought them together instead of separately. I also connected my weak muscles to my weak spirit and my racing thoughts to my labored breath. I struggled to follow directions and felt that almost everything Mr. Short Shorts was instructing me to do was counter intuitive to my attaining inner peace. I felt totally misled. In order to be that woman on the beach, I guess you have to ride a spitting camel through Death Valley with only the lure of possibly finding water.

He said, "Yoga is the path to suffering less."

I think, "*Yeah, compared to this, regular life does seem more enjoyable.*"

He said, "Yoga is transformation into a more honest reflection of self."

"I don't like what I see!"

I stayed and I did everything he said to do. I listened to him and I judged him harshly. I had no explanation at the time why I kept going back day after day after day to ride that mean old camel, red faced in the desert sun. No idea, except for maybe the relief I felt in leaving.

Then, my breath started to deepen, my body started to strengthen. I started connecting the effort to the relief. A deep, rich sense of relief that felt like making peace with myself. Peace that started to move the ease into my efforts. I started to recognize when something wasn't hard, and appreciate that too. I began to understand what it meant to control my thoughts. All the stories in my brain on continuous loop, intercepted, questioned redirected. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had a steering wheel for my mind. My body became a way to practice steering it.

I realized that the yoga teacher wasn't trying to control me, he was trying to guide me, a harmless well meaning, backseat driver. I understood that what I experience is under the strict guide of my reactions and I can relearn some of those reactions and stop bumping into dissatisfaction. I have such creative, descriptive expectations for everything and that is where it gets messy. Letting go of concrete expectations is like letting go of a bad day.

Now I've heard other people's 'come to yoga stories'. I've read of candle lit rooms and hearts opening to tears of joy and endless new possibilities. Not my story.

A lot of love grew out of some serious dislike, and eventually (eight years later) I became a yoga teacher. Today I sit preparing for yet another teacher certification, this time with one of the most respected yoga teachers in the world, Ana Forrest. I can already feel the resentment creeping in and I haven't even met her yet. I still struggle under the pressure of expectations I perceive others have on me. I'm still working on allowing people to 'guide me'. This time I signed up for twenty-six straight days of all day instruction and the anticipation of captivity is sitting uncomfortably on my mind and on my sore right shoulder.

Thankfully, I have witnessed and understand my capacity to face fear and grow. I run toward the rewards that come only after arduous efforts. I crave the journey to a more honest reflection of who I am. I own some stuff that I don't need anymore and need a back seat driver to show me where to drop it off. With this discovery will come a greater capacity for love. And with more love

there is always less suffering.