

The Yoga Connection

Expressions of the Self, Solutions for the Body

Course Excerpt

Course Objectives: At the completion of this course, the participant will be able to

Theoretical

- ✓ explain the difference between the terms posture and structure.
- ✓ identify characteristics of common postural misalignments, based on the three classic Somatotypes.
- ✓ identify the four basic categories of contraindicated Yoga poses.
- ✓ identify and locate the "famous four" muscles that contribute to an aching back.
- ✓ understand the basic guidelines for formatting a Yoga class.
- ✓ discuss the differences between a "fitness-yoga" class format and a "traditional style of Yoga" class format.
- ✓ (creatively & intuitively) identify the universal theme associated with an inspirational piece of music, poetry, or philosophical reading.
- ✓ identify the three dosha types, and have a general understanding of their application to asana.

Practical

- ✓ suggest appropriate asana-based therapeutic recommendations for common postural misalignments.
- ✓ offer appropriate, standard safety cues for the four categories of contraindicated Yoga poses.
- ✓ demonstrate at least one stretch position for each of the "famous four" muscles that commonly contribute to an aching back.
- ✓ teach 5 standing asanas (based on 3 standard, appropriate cues per asana).
- ✓ teach 2 seated stretch positions (based on 3 standard, appropriate cues per position).
- ✓ teach the following breathing techniques: (1) 3 part breath (2) mirror-mirror breathing
- ✓ teach 10 classical gestures by demonstration and pronunciation (Sanskrit name and English meaning).
- ✓ create a themed Yoga class by incorporating an inspirational idea into the asana experience.

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Teaching as an Expression of Who I Am

1. Teaching a specific style:

Students or other yoga instructors often ask me, "What kind of Yoga do you teach?"

If it's a new student doing the asking, I will answer "hatha yoga" which immediately implies the physical branch of yoga and refers to asana. Right away they categorize my class as an "exercise" or "physical fitness" class. Usually students ask this question to clarify whether you are teaching an asana-based Yoga class with a fitness emphasis or a meditative Yoga class with a spiritual emphasis.

If it's another instructor doing the asking, or if the student continues to press for more details, I know that they are interested in finding out exactly what *style* of Yoga I teach. Generally, styles of Yoga imply a standard pre-determined series of poses that are routinely taught in the exact same order every time you teach (or attend) the class.

In a pure "style" of Yoga, the class session will never deviate from the prescribed format. Styles of Yoga are based on and normally named after or associated with the individual who chose the poses and arranged the particular presentation. Some styles include Sivananda, Kriya, Ashtanga, Viniyoga, Kripalu, Integral, Ananda, Bikram, Tri-Yoga, Svaroop, Amrit, Anusara, and Somatic Yoga. Each style normally reflects a certain mood or quality that is brought to the presentation of the poses. That is to say, each style is associated with an expressive presentation as well as a pre-defined format.

For example, the popular Iyengar style of Yoga is an excellent example of a particular type of cueing (favors anatomical cues), a particular mode of instruction (strict, rigid, no nonsense allowed), a particular order of pose presentation (standing poses first), and a particular type of instructor-student interaction (military-like; no praise given).

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Pros / cons of teaching a pre-planned program based on a "style" of Yoga include:

Pros

- 1) You know exactly what you are going to teach, so you don't have to spend time planning class sessions or making lesson plans.
- 2) You will become very familiar (an "expert") with this series of poses because you teach them over and over.
- 3) You feel a commitment to this style of Yoga. You've found your niche.
- 4) The poses in many Yoga styles are based on an "energetic" or spiritual component, which (potentially) contacts a deeper awareness.

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Cons

- 1) Many of these styles include poses that are too hard for the average fitness participant. Often the inclusion of contraindicated poses like inversions leaves you (the instructor) struggling with a safety issue.
- 2) You might become bored because of the lack of variety. You may begin to feel like you are stuck teaching the same old thing every time.
- 3) You are pigeonholed as a teacher. "Mary is a Sivananda teacher."
- 4) You cannot express personal creativity or introduce new ideas or elements to the class.

It's worthwhile to consider the pros and cons of teaching a particular style of Yoga. Even then, many instructors specialize in a particular style but don't stick to it in the absolute sense. Should you feel a real affinity for a particular Yoga style or a special connection with the leader/creator of that style, then this might be the Yoga teaching-path that's best for you.

To get certification as a teacher of a particular style of Yoga (i.e. to be able to advertise yourself and your class using that style's name), you'll need to apply for, attend, and complete all the pre-requisites and standard requirements for that style's teaching certificate. Plan to make a commitment to this particular style, because you'll be investing a lot of time and money into your training.

Let's go back to the original question, "What kind of Yoga do you teach?" Personally, I no longer adhere to one pure style. I've studied a number of styles, and taken what I felt was the best of each and combined them into my own unique presentation.

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For this reason I do not choose to follow a preordained program. Though I may have a lesson plan in hand, I have no personal agenda. Nor am I using the class to get my own work-out. When I teach, it's not about me. It's about my students, and my top priority is safety for each individual. I will modify a pose on the spot, if necessary. I will modify the class format on the spot, if necessary. I will adapt any pose for any individual student, if necessary.

Because I don't adhere to a particular style of Yoga, my answer to the question "What kind of Yoga do you teach?" is . . .

"I teach an eclectic blend of styles."

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