

Choosing a Yoga Teacher Training Programme

by Anne Combrinck

Deciding to become a yoga teacher is a big decision. Participating in a yoga class where you are receiving the instruction and carrying it out in a focused and absorbed way is very different to standing at the front of the class giving the instruction, demonstrating the instruction and then assisting the students with corrections.

Student vs. Teacher

As a student of yoga you are in a world of your own silence, centred on your breath flowing in and out and feeling the body move or hold a specific position. Each pose is carried out to completion, moving from its beginning through its perfection to its ending - harmoniously and gracefully (or not!). As the teacher your breathing is interrupted due to talking, the demonstrations are often not held to maximum benefit or sometimes not even repeated to the opposite side of the body. You never take part in the yoga nidra (relaxation) at the end of the class because you're guiding the students through it - quite a different story to 'blissing out' for those last few minutes. It is for this reason that yoga teachers have to allocate time in each day to do their own practice or attend another teacher's class.

The Role of the Yoga Teacher

And yet the teacher is rewarded in other ways. He/she has the opportunity to see the unfolding of stiff bodies and stressed minds into relaxed, open and balanced human beings. Physically, joints loosen up and muscles lengthen as they relax, allowing the body to be softer, tension-free and more energetic. A greater supply of oxygen to the body leaves the students glowing. Mentally, the students become more alert, the left and right hemispheres of the brain working in a balanced way, they are calmer, more satisfied with their day-to-day living. The teacher sees that they are emotionally more stable after attending yoga classes, they do not get angry as quickly as before, and know how to act rather than re-act in difficult circumstances.

Choosing a Yoga Teacher Training course

These days there are many options to choose from when deciding on taking a training course in this field. Some schools of yoga are very physical and focus primarily on bodywork, to the exclusion of the deeper aspects of yoga; some schools are based purely on the spiritual aspect without any concern for the health of the physical body. Here we need to consider what yoga is!

Yoga means 'yoke'; 'union'; to join. Therefore in yoga we are aiming to 'join' all aspects of being human – that is the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. If we are successful in this, we become harmonious, peaceful and balanced. Therefore a balanced teaching that encompasses all these aspects is yoga, anything that removes a single part of the teaching is no longer yoga, but rather becomes another form of gymnastics/calisthenics or a religiousness/spirituality.

Therefore it is important to choose a yoga school whose wisdom and knowledge is from the original ancient teachings, and is all encompassing. It is also important to choose a yoga school who complies with standards that are internationally set and accepted, and is registered with an organisation that keeps these standards.

Part-Time or Full-Time

These are important factors to take into consideration, as are the cost and location of the courses. It is useless contemplating a course if it is not convenient to your lifestyle. Part-time courses that meet once or twice a week have the advantage that you can integrate the knowledge slowly over a longer period of time, but may not be suitable if you live very far away. Shorter more intensive courses have the advantage that you can live, eat, sleep, dream yoga for the duration and make it part of your life before returning to 'normal' life and integrating it. However the amount of knowledge can be overwhelming to slower learners. The intensive courses usually incorporate a period of time of correspondence study as well for further understanding of the teachings.

For live-in courses one also has to consider the living conditions – will you be staying in a dormitory with 20 others – this may not be easy to do if you are middle aged and used to living in the comfort and privacy of your own home. What is the food like – perhaps you are not used to very spicy food, will there be options if you have food allergies? Are the teachers friendly and accommodating or are they strict and not living their teachings?

In the end you have to take an educated, intuitive approach. You have certain choices to make and then once you have decided – make the best of it and get the most of it.

Be Sure You want to Teach

After considering all the facts it is also important that you are able to share the teachings with others. Some people are born to be teachers – it comes naturally to them; some are able to learn to become teachers with lots of hard work and practice; but there are some who may never be able to teach – and these people need to accept that they are better off attending regular yoga classes and enjoying them.

Teaching yoga requires every part of us - involving our emotional, spiritual, and intellectual centres simultaneously. Teaching yoga also means that you become the eternal student – just because you have gone through a training programme does not mean that you have learnt it all – it is only the beginning of your own long road of learning and practice!

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