

Find a new angle for interest. How to keep our yoga fresh?

A new term and a new theme to inspire yourself and students?

I love the challenge to find a new angle, to help our students:

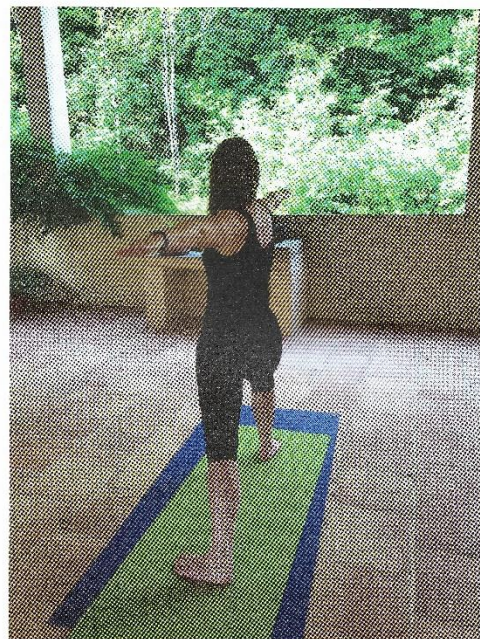
- look afresh and question
- feel their yoga and find a deeper connection
- introduce a pose from a different perspective
- simply shake up the predictable in class and our own self practise!

It's so easy to fall into patterns (and I have cringed at other teachers rattling off their class by rote). I find a theme helps create a weekly hook for each class and easily the term writes itself.

We often start with the anatomical and kinaesthetic learning with a terms' progression of poses, a different warrior or chest openers/ backbend to focus on each week, maybe building to a challenging finale?

How to bring fresh themes to the mat and engage cognitive learning and deeper connection? Bring everyday life into class: celebrate the passage of the year or key events; a historical quote to raise ethical awareness. Each season offers a new shift in energy and focus.

On my own journey on Foundation I resonated Patanjali's Yamas & Niyamas give a great resource for self discovery across ten weeks. We can always add a couple of the



eight spokes of the wheel of yoga to extend to a longer 12week term! Add both Pratayara and Dharnasana to invite students to move into stillness and towards meditation.

Share the rich feast of texts and readings

The wealth of poems and reflective texts offered by different belief systems can provide an inclusive approach for term. For each week's stillness & reflection, I find a philosophical text, poem, prayer or meditation:

Buddhist

Choose some of the 21 attributes of the Buddha to reflect on the qualities we can all adopt: his long tongue as he speaks kindly to all; perfect shaped earlobes as he listens with open, non-judgemental heart; open hands with elegant fingers as Buddha offers all he has to those in need or hungry.

Agnostic

I balance the spiritual with agnostic point of view, hence I draw on the here & now. The solidity of our body, the feel of the hard floor beneath us, and observing the simple mechanics of our breath.

Christian

Create a Savasana with visualisation, using the symbolism of Archangel Michael, his blue cloak of protection and bejewelled sword to cut away old thought patterns or habits that bind us.

Druid

Celebrate the Solstice with a vase of twigs in blossom and

fresh flowers to share a Druids poem, Oak by Aderyn y Mor:

THE OAK TREE

The Oak Tree stands, silent, gazing
With the wisdom of one hundred years,
Witness to life's joys and sorrows,
to the laughter and the tears.
To love lost and love found,
To the happiness and pain
Life's dramas all unfolding,
Sunlit skies and winter's rain
The dance of Nature continues on.
The light, the blue, the dark, the grey,
Ever constant yet ever changing
As the seasons dance and play
And the Oak Tree stands, silent, gazing..."

Be authentic to you

I remember, as a new teacher, being so in awe of Sandy Chubb teaching in virtual silence with few yet poignant cues. Drawing from her intrinsic Buddhist serenity she founded the Prison Phoenix Trust. Sandy so understood the need for prisoners to find and own their yoga, enabling peacefulness within themselves through asana and breath, even in a restricted harsh environment. Temperamentally, I struggle with silence but I have gradually learnt to pare back my natural chatter and leave space for my students. I occasionally declare I'll speak less to the amusement of my long-term students who know my need to correct and encourage!

What is Yoga?

What is Yoga?' A 4 year old explains: "Ok, so yoga is just... You breathe in and out, like this. Then you start doing slow moving Karate"

I designed my class around the idea that when a 4-year-old is tickled on a shoulder they react with their whole body joining in. Limbering in cat: the 4-year-old squirms and wriggles with pleasure as tickled.

Draw a figure '8' with your hips in Cat?

Overcoming their embarrassment, adults found it liberating to enhance the Animal sequence with sound: tapping their Rabbit feet on the mat; a sharp hiss and miaow in Cat and Hollow Cat; long woofs in Downward Facing Dog, and far too realistic spit in Camel pose! We then did 'slow karate' with moving sequences and strong.

Virabhadrasana 2

Try shooting arrows with a sharp exhale. The joy and laughter in class was delightful. I was able to expand this theme with it being mental health awareness week and link the benefits of laughter and how it stimulates deeper inhalation with our intercostal muscles working overtime.

Find the tempo and delivery that suits you.

Our style of teaching will continue to evolve as we continue to grow and develop ourselves. Always make time for a class yourself to experience the students' needs, which helps define our Why and What is our Yoga in teaching. Back in class pose the open question, invite reflections and self-analysis:

- How does this asana/pose feel now
- Lopsided/ stiff/ free/ awkward?
- How can you soften or strengthen,

- Room to shift or adapt to ease or deepen asana?
- How does this side compare to first side? Why is it harder or easier?

Where is your breath?

Especially useful for challenging asanas or a twist that restricts / opens breath.

A good indication you've found a reading with the right nub of insight is watching class postures and facial expressions as they ponder. I usually see affirmed nods as they absorb Gandhi's reflection upon Upanishad wisdom: Watch your thoughts for they become words, watch your words for they become actions, watch your actions, for they become habits, watch your habits for they become your character, watch your character for it becomes your destiny.

Enjoy your self-practice and sharing a different angle to yoga with your students in class. Om Shanti.

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References

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Gandhi Quote attributed to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras