

The Empowered Learner

Written by Julie Rost

People often talk about "aha" moments in Yoga. A light bulb goes on and we have a moment of enlightenment. A common "aha" moment for Yoga students has to do with discovering a new way of thinking about ourselves and our world. Sometimes this happens through quiet reflection, sometimes through the assistance of a teacher, and sometimes through life experience. The key is to recognize the benefits and value of all three, and to approach our learning with a balance of self-empowerment as well as a willingness and openness to receive.

Until we become conscious, we are largely operating on "automatic pilot" based on the influences of our childhood. We can get used to being told what to do and what to think. Our culture offers countless books, quick fixes, promises, gurus and one-size-fits-all programs to solve our pain, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. It can be highly appealing to have someone else or a "pill" take away our suffering. In Yoga we call this a "tamasic" or disempowered approach. Alternately, a "rajasic" or ego-based approach would be one in which we go to the other extreme and become as rigid or dogmatic as the people or institutions we criticize, refusing to open our mind to new understanding.

Yoga promotes self-reliance facilitated by different processes of looking inward, as well as the wisdom to know when we need help or another viewpoint. Many students are amazed, through activities such as journaling and meditation, at the insight and inner knowledge that comes and is always available to us. But how often do we stop and listen? Do we trust the guidance? It takes practice to understand the language of our soul, and many of us forget to care for ourselves or feel pressured to stay busy, and sometimes the quiet moments are too difficult.

This is where our Yoga teacher can help us really transform and transcend. Guided by the timeless teachings and practices of Yoga, together we learn how to minimize suffering and maximize enlightenment. In a large part due to their own practice and living of Yoga, and their ongoing commitment to being students themselves, our teachers help us "see" and understand the old behaviors and patterns that are hindering our personal growth. They guide us on our journey by empowering us, making no promises and requiring no praise. The teacher is merely, yet powerfully, a conduit of Yoga-any insight that occurs for the student does so because the seed was already there. The Yoga teacher, which includes the Yoga community, provides the environment within which the student discovers their own wisdom.

In this light, the true student of Yoga respects and appreciates the learning available to them

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within a living and practicing Yoga community. If you show up to a class and your "favorite" teacher is not there, do you leave or are you open to a new experience of Yoga presented by a new teacher? Remember, most of our favorite teachers were once the substitute or student teacher! Let us be open to those experiences of life that most challenge our willingness to learn and grow.

We look forward to learning together with you,

Julie