

my life in yoga with

Uma Inder

When and how did you first become interested in Yoga?

UI: As far back as I can remember, Yoga was a part of family life, especially when we visited my grandfather, an adventurer who left the predictability of his life in India for the wilderness of Kenya. My grandfather is renowned for offering his family home as shelter to the followers of Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya. To me he seemed a fearless, conscientious man. His practice focused on Sun Salutations and lengthy headstands. His strict insistence on Yoga for his own children succeeded only in pushing most of them away from their ancestral heritage. My grandfather and mother were my inspiration. As children, we spent most of our free days on the savannah, and my first recognition of powerful, electrified humans with clear, far-seeing minds came whenever I fell in step with the Masai, as they roamed their equatorial paradise. As a young, record-holding athlete, I always enjoyed the freedom of being in physical motion and playing the edge. But, as a little girl I never dared imagine that I could ever meet a real yogi.

Can you say a little about your practice and the teachers you have followed?

UI: My present practice is fuelled by the simple enjoyments of being human. It celebrates the natural synergy of bio-energetics in Yoga and Indian Temple Dance (Odissi). These are preserved in the devotional yogini and shakta traditions. Mudras are used as a way of inviting and containing the divine, embodying a union of consciousness and energy.

At 14, I became responsible for my own life's choices, and from this age onwards, big questions arose, "Why me?" "Who am I?" "What am I?" The search for a teacher begun, and at 19, I decided to pack up, head out and go look for him or her. I found him. He was called "The Laughing Yogi".

After years of practising and teaching Yoga under the guidance of my teacher, I found myself in California, caught up in the popular surge of Yoga as a fun, body-conscious driven adventure. The vibrant centre of all this action was Sacred Movement in Los Angeles, where I learned an emerging style of Yoga called 'Vinyasa Flow'. Much attention was placed on form, alignment and sequential movement. This was a playful addition to my own practice, which featured mostly kriyas and select asanas held for 30 minutes to 3 hours. Also in play was the entertainment quota of a commercial Yoga class, and as soon as I started to feel a bit like a flamboyant DJ, whose iPod repertoire mattered as much as the transformational content of the Yoga teachings, I quickly left town. Truth be told, the familiar essence of Yoga evaded me in these classes. The music and choreography efforts of a typical Vinyasa type class pulled me away from inner breath cycles and spontaneous expression.

In Berkeley, I studied with Dharmanidhi Sarasvati. It was around this time, I discovered Satyananda Saraswati's Bihar School of Yoga. Much of my current practice and teachings are influenced by this school. Currently, I am studying Sanskrit with Swami Vagishananda Saraswati, disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and long-time teacher of Advaita Vedanta.

How has Yoga benefited you?



“My general Ayurvedic health practice focuses on the principle, “Know thyself, heal thyself”. In this sense, we take the responsibility of healing back into our own hands, with the undeniable rewards of a life lived in balance”.

UI: Conscious breathing transforms my life. Every question I have about self-identity, purpose in life and relevance to the ‘Big Picture’ is resolved in Yoga. All fears and uncertainty are dissolved in Yoga. Cells re-vitalise in Yoga. Grace flows in Yoga.

Can you say a little about your background in Ayurveda and how this relates to your interest in Yoga?

UI: Ayurveda is a living system of natural medicine, based on pure common sense. Ayurveda was also a part of my family life as it is for most Indians, even though we take it for granted. The conscious rituals of our traditional way of life echo the timeless wisdom of natural law: birthing, cooking, eating, washing, exercising, playing, loving, serving, praying and dying. I graduated as a practitioner from the American Institute of Ayurveda (Kerala Academy of Ayurveda), choosing this program for the large faculty of specialised Indian Ayurvedic doctors. I apprenticed to the Ayurvedic Doctor Raam Pandey. In South India I initiated my studies of panchakarma, the keystone of Ayurvedic healing, a systematic purification and rejuvenation of body tissue that re-organises your life at all levels.

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I see that the next ‘generation’ of Yoga teachers will be naturally compelled to research Ayurveda. Rudimentary study will then become mandatory for any authentic teacher of Yoga. Yoga is incomplete without the practice of Ayurvedic principles as a complementary framework of therapy and lifestyle.

What prompted you to set up your Retreat Centre in Bali and what kind of courses do you run there?

UI: The choice to return to Bali was based on desire for real community living, as reflected by the Balinese themselves. The way of sustainable and natural living can be real here. Bali is fast becoming a convergence point for international yogis, healers, teachers and seekers. I am affiliated as a teacher and Ayurvedic consultant with the Bali Spirit, a flourishing Yoga cultural centre. We run Yoga and Ayurveda short break and retreat programmes

What plans have you for the future?

UI: I am often asked to teach practices that seem ‘new’ to many. I am developing immersion trainings in natural settings that bring together an integrated faculty of teachers, specialised in the complementary studies of Yoga, Ayurveda, Sacred Arts and courses such as ‘Joyous Birthing’. These trainings will provide a gurukul (live-in) experience and asides from fulfilling Yoga Alliance requirements, we will offer Sanskrit and relevant, constructive practices, including mantra.



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