

When you take a yoga class led by Jamila Ekukpe, the first thing you notice is how professional she is as a teacher. Clearly experienced with her craft, Ekukpe welcomes students into her downtown Oakland studio with an aura of confidence that puts one at ease when they lay down their mat for a class. She takes a direct and thoughtful approach throughout, drawing on both her understanding of the human body and her emotional intelligence to lead her classes to a better place each session, both physically and mentally.

Although she could easily be mistaken for yet another highly qualified yoga instructor that Bay Area yogis are lucky to choose from, look deeper and you will find a person that has much more to offer than a series of timed asanas. She has a much deeper message to share.

Born and raised in Dallas, Texas by Nigerian parents, Ekukpe had very little yoga influence in her life growing up. It certainly wasn't a path she envisioned for herself growing up. After graduating from high school, Ekukpe decided that a career in the Air Force would give her a stable career path and a chance to see the world. Unfortunately, that's not how it played out for her at all. Instead, she was faced with empty promises unfulfilled and a serious back injury that required extensive rehab.

Because the Air Force had given her a taste of life in California, Ekukpe decided to stay and enroll at San Jose State to pursue her degree post service. Upon completion, she found herself in the corporate world of Bay Area real estate. Although successful, Ekukpe found that it didn't allow her to sufficiently spread her perspectives on both mental and physical fitness. Perspectives and opinions that she takes very seriously.

"In the Air Force, I experienced obstacles with race and gender that I didn't feel I deserved to face. For a lot of reasons it was unhealthy for me. By the time it was over, I had physical scars from my back injury and some mental scars from the culture there," she explains.

As Ekukpe continued to rehab from her back injury, she found that yoga was an essential ingredient in getting her back on her feet both physically and emotionally. Enamored by the process of healing and growth, Ekukpe began to feel the desire within her to teach yoga herself. She found a teacher training program with Annie Carpenter and hasn't looked back.

"Teaching yoga really brings out the best in me. It allows me to connect with the public and share my teachings in a way that benefits not only my students, but myself as well. When I walk into a class, some people might make judgements based on how I look or what my background is, but that fades away when a class starts. All that matters is the hour at hand and how it makes people feel. I think that can be very powerful."

When taking a class with Ekukpe, it is easy to be inspired by her calm confidence that she brings to the room every session. Her physical gifts as a yogi are easy to spot, but her emotional response to her class is equally as valuable. A long path has led Ekukpe to finally be teaching yoga in the Bay Area. We are lucky to have her and learn from her journey.