



9. LUKE MEYER

NDM. How and when did you discover Bikram yoga?

Luke Meyer. With how far this whole yoga trip has gone, I often wonder if it isn't that Bikram yoga discovered me. Esoteric speculation aside, here's the scoop:

I was living in Houston, Texas after a drug addled tour of Eastern Europe had left me homesick and disillusioned. I really couldn't believe that with all my tattoos and talent, and my sheer capacity to consume mind altering chemicals, that I wasn't famous in Budapest or Prague. Go figure...so me and my girl at the time aimed for the most American part of America we could think of. No more mineral water, no more not understanding words, no more cold weather and certainly no more shitty drugs. We wanted sun, English, beer, and strong, close to the border of Mexico, old fashioned, hard drugs. Houston fit like a glove. It must've been only a few months after getting there that we had already entangled ourselves into a fine mess of a life. Squatting on an acquaintances couch, working day labor, and, I would speculate, just a few nights away from a big O.D. I say big, because the small ones were frequent and handled in-house with the trip to the cold shower and a slap in the face. The start of the actual yoga classes was

somewhere close to five or so years ago. The journey probably began in another life...

NDM: Can you tell me about some of the psychological , spiritual and physical benefits of practicing Bikram yoga and how you apply these benefits in your daily life?

LM. One of the obvious benefits from Bikram yoga is just feeling good. This yoga has been proven to reduce chronic pain in many areas that people in our stress filled lifestyle find common. Many degenerative diseases and conditions become reduced and in many cases remitted. Simply put, if you feel good physically, it will make it a lot easier to be fit and open emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Now, it is not to say that someone who has physical limitations, illness or injury cannot be well and balanced in an emotional, mental or spiritual way, but really it is a lot less likely. Back when I started the yoga, due to my recently relinquished, but nonetheless toxic lifestyle, I was beginning to suffer from rheumatoid arthritis. When I woke up in the morning with excruciating pain in my back, legs, hands and feet, do you think I was in any way pleasant to be around??? no way. Now I am absolutely a-symptomatic - no pain - no swelling. I'm usually in a pretty good mood too...

But beyond that, there is the idea of self study and realization. After practicing, especially Bikram yoga for some time, the practice becomes a mode of self inquiry, self healing and self actualization. I say especially Bikram because of the nature of practicing the fixed series, over and over again. A friend of mine once said that advanced yoga does not mean doing necessarily any "harder" or "fancier" postures. Advanced yoga is deeper, more inquisitive work within any, even the same postures. Simply by repeating the series over and over, as we do in Bikram method, one is automatically given the chance to do just that. I no longer study postures. I study myself in the asanas. I examine my way of being, who I am choosing to be, what is my overall nature, what is my subtle nature. Where am I

being absolutely authentic and beautiful, and where am I being less than honest, and selling myself short. The asanas become simply a medium through which I experiment being me, and from which I can divine information to use to my advantage in my life. What triggers anger for me right now? How can I better surrender to circumstance that is beyond my capacity to control? How can I take greater responsibility for myself? Do I seek comfort over exploration? What conditions trigger me becoming lazy? What conditions inspire me? All of these types of questions apply very easily to your life. After a time, even your day to day life becomes a method of self inquiry, self study. It becomes a 24 hour a day, moving meditation, where the questions revealed in ones life and practice are eventually answered and replaced through ones living and practicing meditation. It becomes self perpetuating, even self creating and realizing after a time. Every day answers a new question and reveals ten more. Realization is an infinite process, it is a path, not a destination. You do not become fully realized. You become fully realizing.

Bikram says, "Yoga is the most amazing, biggest subject in the whole world. It is the only subject where the subject is not also the object. The object of yoga is not yoga. The object of yoga is you, and you are infinite." And really, if you can make it regularly to and through a Bikram yoga class, one of the most intense classes around anywhere, then anything else will be a piece of cheesecake. I mean how could a traffic jam even begin to compete with you hanging your torso upside down between your legs, which are on fire, with streams of salty sweat pouring up the nose and into the eyes, and trying to hear the instructors word over the heartbeat pounding in your ears, 45 minutes through a 90 minute class... nothing will be able to touch you. Again, to quote my teacher...

"Do my yoga everyday, and you will become bullet-proof, money-proof, sex-proof, distraction-proof, everything-proof and become like super-human, a holy yogi...."

NDM: Where did Bikram's method of the fixed sequence of 26 poses derive from and the amount of time each position is held? What is the benefit of performing the exact same pose twice?

LM. The derivation of Bikram's series began with his work in Tokyo. In the tradition of age old Hatha yogis, Bikram was seeing "patients" with a variety of conditions, injuries and illnesses. For each one, he would "prescribe" a posture or postures in order to stimulate healing or growth in whatever particular area ill affected. This method was effective, but obviously had its limitations as far as the amount of people one yogi could deal with in a day. After seeing the high incidence of physical and mental imbalance in the west, Bikram knew he needed a way to treat more people at a time. So he devised his series, a system of postures that are scientifically arranged to move the body from one pose to the next, each warming and preparing for the one that follows, and in such a way that by the time you get to the end of the class every single system in the body has been addressed, cleansed, stretched, oxygenated and overall put back into a direction of relative balance right down to a cellular level. There have been refinements over the years, such as the addition of heat (when Bikram first started using the series he was in Hawaii, so there was little need for artificial heat), but for the most part years and years and millions of cases have proven the effectiveness and sustained benefit from a regular practice of this method. There are literally as many testimonials as to the effectiveness of this yoga as there are people doing it. Everything from dealing with stress or depression, to weight issues, to chronic degenerative disease such as diabetes and arthritis. For more on this, go to www.bikramyoga.com and check out the testimonials...

The timing of the series is specified as well. Often what happens in a yoga posture is the movement increases, or restricts blood flow to a particular area of the body, even to a specific organ. By holding, and then releasing and pausing we create what is known as the tourniquet effect, where the resulting flood of oxygen and nutrients in the form of blood flow works to deeply cleanse and heal the bodies less accessible tissues and organs.

Pause and repeat makes this effect even more profound, as usually the second set of a given posture, the body is more prepared, warmed and ready to do a little deeper stretching, a little more compressing, a little further cleansing, and accordingly a little more healing and regeneration.

As always in the class there are multiple levels upon which we are operating, and the two set system offers us another advantage. The simple process of repeating the same posture immediately over again in the series allows us to take the depth of our work in the posture to a new level, and perhaps see the posture, and thereby ourselves in a new light, a unique perspective. I describe it like this. Imagine you were to watch a short film, paying close attention to how the film made you feel, what you liked, what was funny and so forth. Then as soon as you finished, you rewind the movie, reflected for a moment on what you got out of it the first time, and then watched it again. Assuredly the things you would notice, feel, see and even hear would be very different. After a time of practicing this, one could even steer ones perceptions within the process towards seeing and feeling things that we first would have never even considered finding in the film. It transforms the simple act of watching the film into a medium of self examination and realization. In this way the class is again a perfect introduction to a way of meditation and self inquiry.

NDM: What are the reasons and advantages of practicing yoga in a heated room as opposed to other yoga practices in which many of the rooms are air conditioned? Also why the carpet and mirrors?

LM. Practicing in heat offers a few distinctions, some of them especially advantageous to beginners. First and foremost is the warming and loosening of muscles and supple tissues such as fascia in order to prevent

injury or over stretching, as is more likely for an inexperienced person with cold muscles and low body awareness in a cool environment.

The heat increases circulation, speeding the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to all of the bodies cells, promoting efficient healing and new tissue growth, even in some areas that are ordinarily considered to be irreparable when damaged, such as the knees.

Heating the room also provides for a medium of removing toxins through profuse sweating. The skin is the bodies single largest elimination organ, though in our current, climate controlled environment and sedentary lifestyle, it is rarely used. The brunt of the burden of detoxifying the body ends up on the liver, lymph nodes, and the colon. Especially considering the higher level of toxins being generated both externally, via pollution and things like processed foods, and internally, via stress and things like depression, our elimination system needs all the help it can get! Toxins building up in our bodies create vicious cycles such as mutation (cancer) and chronic degenerations such as Alzheimer's and arthritis.

The most important element of the heat is a little less easily explained and grasped, because it is much more individual and abstract. Heat is simply the addition of a form of energy. More energy ups the stakes, so to speak, and accelerates catharsis on every level. View anything that happens in the class on the physical plane also to be a beautiful metaphor for what happens on the esoteric, or metaphysical level. The two things are after all indivisible, they are the same thing. That is why I have come to call Bikram yoga a uniquely "wholeistic" practice. It approaches the whole being. The physical things become manifest on many other levels. Just look at the few we have already listed, and view them in this way. Increased flexibility (becoming more open), increased circulation (greater flow of life to all of the being), detoxification (letting go of inhibiting patterns). I am sure this list is customized for each of us and the unique intuitive experience that each of us has or will have in doing this yoga over time.

Critics of the heat need to keep in mind that most every yoga promotes warming the muscles in some fashion or another, either through pranyama or slowly moving into a series. In Bikram yoga we cut right to the chase after two sets of pranyama deep breathing, which, when combined with the heat amply warm the body very quickly. I always like to remind people too, where yoga came from, and was practiced for time immemorial. That's right, India, where it is pretty warm as I recall, and most folks a thousand years ago didn't have AC...

LM. As far as the carpet, we do it because Bikram asks us to. I would imagine his logic is simply to keep students from having a sweaty, slippery, hard floor to work on. The subtle give of the carpet removes any impact one might have from moving into the postures. I have also noticed in studios that use hardwood a tendency for the moisture to permeate into the wood and start a kind of rotting, sweat and wood smell.

The mirrors perform a couple of functions. They first allow the method of teaching, where one teacher can instruct many (I just taught over 200 in L.A. at the teacher training) many students, with fairly consistent results, as the way we are taught by Bikram and his staff to teach is in a way that teaches people to self correct under the guidance of an experienced teacher. Self adjusting is a very powerful way to repattern our physical and mental being which is why Bikram teachers very rarely physically move a person into a posture. We use touch only to draw attention to a location, not to move it. We understand as Bikram teachers that the process of learning to get into the posture is more important than actually just being in the posture itself. To quote Bikram here, " In my yoga, the journey is the destination..."

Also, while observing ones self in action and in stillness, one has the opportunity to reflect. Remembering that this yoga is wholeistic, it would

stand to reason that self examination on an apparently surface level could lead easily to reflections of another sort. Self acceptance is one example of the many of these type of realizations that come out of the "reflective" nature of the practice. One has to see who one truly is in order that one reveal more and more of that person to oneself and ultimately the world.

The mirrors also allow us as teachers to really survey the whole room at all times, often seeing one student from multiple angles, so that we can assure safe and profound work happening in the class.

NDM: What is it like owning the New York Chelsea Bikram Studios and what advice would you give to someone thinking of practicing Bikram?

LM: Owning a yoga studio is like doing yoga. There are times that are really hard, and you don't know if you are going to make it, those times when you see all of the hard work and effort about to slip away. Those are the times when you really need to focus and breathe, and try to step back and just observe the self in action and in stillness, knowing that this moment will pass. There are times when it is blissful and joyful, and a whole lot of fun. There is stillness and repetition; I have folded about ten million towels and learned to sit and be patient when there is nothing to be done. Everything I have learned and observed from this process can apply to any of the other processes I am in in my life. Indeed it is just one of the planes on this multifaceted jewel that is me, all with a view to the center, all reflecting that same purpose and state as well as being a window into the heart of the matter.

Anything in your life has the capacity of becoming this process of revealing, but it needs to start somewhere, and a Bikram Yoga practice is a great starting point.

Do you wish to be amazing? Do you wish to be beautiful? Do you wish to be strong, balanced, focused? Genuine, integrated, joyful, open, empowered, clear, fit, inspired?

Know this, you won't find these things in a book or pill or house or car or even in another person. You can't find these things because YOU NEVER LOST THEM.

You already are these things. You have just forgotten somewhere along the way.

I am only here to help you to remember, the mirrors to help to remind you, the postures to help you practice being these things. The yoga is already there, it is the fire, the desire, the devotion that you will discover in you. It is not gone, none of it, you will see. Trust me, I was there at the brink and I came all the way back again. The yoga is already there, it always was, the yoga is you, your life, your business, your relationships....YOU!!!

Bikram says, "It is never too late, never too old, never too sick, never too broken, never too alone, never too lost to begin again."

It is not important where you start from, more important that you start. You are the journey, and you will realize that journey more every day.

One more Bikram quote that I think sums it all up.

"Every journey begins with the single step...."

I look forward to meeting you all soon.

Namaste Luke.

For more info about Bikram yoga visit

www.bikramyogachelsea.com