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## TOPIC OF THE MONTH

April 2013

### Jois Yoga

I had the opportunity this month to take a workshop with Saraswathi and Sharath at the new Jois Yoga in Greenwich, CT. What a beautiful shala! Light and sunny, high ceilings, big windows, shiva and ganesh statues all over, flowers abundant, and pictures of pattabhi jois, sharath, and saraswati line all the walls .... Driving up looking for it the first day I turned onto the road and saw this big building with "JOIS" on it --- i did not recognize it ... Wasn't looking for the name Jois on the building -- usually you would see asthanga . . .



The experience of practicing with the Jois family again is very enriching, I chose this time to take classes all week with Saraswathi (Pattabhi Jois's daughter who is 72 this year!). What a very sweet (and strong) woman she is. Her led class sounded and felt just like Pattabhi Jois was teaching, her assists were a bit more gentle though but still firm and direct.

I also like how the Jois's cue a led class -- vinyasas and transitions are quick, counts in the poses slow. This makes sense -- the benefit is in the posture, you want to spend more of your practice time in the posture and less time fidgeting your body getting into the pose . . . Remember the point of vinyasa is to align you with your breath, so the vinyasa between the poses should not take more than about 2 breaths!

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BeFit Body & Mind YOGA



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I was looking forward to a week of primary . . . but much to my surprise by the third day my back was hurting . . . I know my body needs back bending but I was surprised how quickly my body missed it. This reassures my feeling of how glad I am I learned Ashtanga in the "old days" -- the only requirement to start 2nd was a consistent practice! And you were taught 2nd pretty quickly after learning primary, this is because 2nd is a counterbalance to primary -- not an advancement of it. Too much forward bending without the counterbalance of backward bending leaves your lower back weak and un-stabilized. 2nd series also helps open up the hips and reduces strain on the knees caused by the lotus and half lotus positions. It is important though to learn the practice slowly -- and from a teacher you trust who has also learned the practice from a trusted long time teacher.

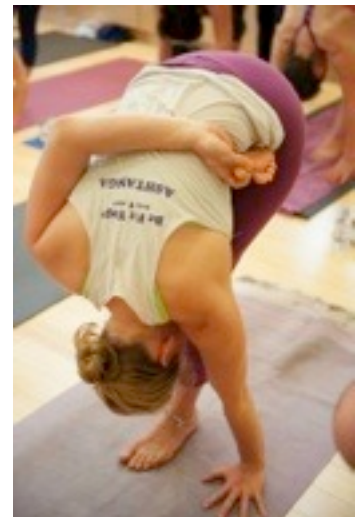
I was also surprised how doing all the extra vinyasa made my shoulders even tighter. It's funny . . . but the longer I practice the less vinyasa I have been doing. At some point you realize the practice is



not about doing 50 vinyasas in an hour or so . . . Again back in the "old days" there were a lot less vinyasas in Primary. As our western minds got ahold of this practice we made it more of a militant workout than a therapeutic practice to detoxify and align our bodies. The purpose of vinyasa is to align our movement with our breath, and as Pattabhi Jois says, to "boil our blood" -- or increase the heat in our body to aid in the removal of toxins. I don't want to

discourage your from doing all the vinyasas 6 days per week if you have been and you feel good . . . I think it is beneficial to do all the vinyasas one or two days each week, but not 6 days per week -- it is too depleting on the body and mind. Do just enough vinyasas (referring to the chaturanaga/up dog/down dog between postures and sides) to get heat in your body. In the book "the teachings and life of Krishnamacharya" he is quoted as saying too many sun salutes/vinyasas are bad for the joints. I would agree. Our practice is not about how many vinyasas you can do -- and if you are putting too much energy into vinyasas you are missing many of the benefits of the practice. Better to save your energy for deep breathing with bandhas while in the state of the asana.

We have some scientific research behind the fact that short duration interval







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training type of work is best for our body and longevity. Marathoners actually scar their heart tissues and prematurely age due to all the free radicals that are the by-products of exercise. And Pattabhi Jois has told Nancy "one hour each day you take practice". If you are doing 50+ vinyasa your practice will be longer than an hour . .

#### Little Talks

Saraswathi gave some talks after a few of the classes, below are the highlights:



On  
Pranayama -  
Since

Sharath was teaching pranayama at the Greenwich workshops someone had asked Saraswathi about when they can start pranayama; I love her answer:

You can start pranayama when you can do every pose in primary and intermediate with sound (meaning with sound) and deep breathing as you do in Padmasana.

On 'Ladies Holiday' - Another day Saraswathi spoke of the importance of not practicing 3 days during menstruation. She said our female bodies need rest; not only do we cook and take care of children and housework but today many women also work outside the home. Our bodies need rest during this time. In India it is very important -- women do not even cook or clean during menstruation, they take rest for three days and the

husband takes care of the house and chores during that time :) She also said taking ladies holiday is important for the regularity of your cycle -- practicing through menstruation makes cycles bad.

On Pregnancy and Ashtanga Yoga - Saraswathi said first three months no practice. Then take practice but modify and skip some asanas like Marichyasana series. Practice through the last 6 months is very good for Mama and baby. Indian women tend to be lazy and want to take bed rest for all nine months -- this is not good.

Sharath also gave a talk the last day, here are some highlights from his talk:

In talking about his practice, he said he gets up at 1:00am . . . someone had asked him how long does his practice last? He said 24 hours :)





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(my first teacher Beryl Bender Birch also spoke of this in 1998 when I was learning from her).

Sharath said yoga is not just asana but it is also the yamas and niyamas which we practice all day long. It is not just physical health that enables us to lead a meaningful life.



Sharath also spoke about Parampara and the importance of following a lineage . . . and I agree with this to a degree . . . I am a bit confused though, Sharath speaks of the importance of Parampara but the practice today is not being taught quite like Pattabhi Jois used to teach it. And maybe its just the practice has gotten so popular and westernized -- Nancy speaks of her memories of going to Mysore in the 70's when there were very few Westerners in the room. She had noticed that Pattabhi Jois taught the Indians very differently from how he taught the Westerners. My understanding of what she observed is that the Indians were given more modifications and

more of a therapeutic Ashtanga practice. Many of the Westerners there already had very advanced practices and Pattabhi Jois gave them very advanced Ashtanga Yoga -- it seems this model is how the practice is taught today, leaving the individualizations of the practice in the dust . . . I am fortunate to have Nancy as my teacher. She showed up in Mysore (with David Williams) sick and weak Pattabhi Jois taught her very differently from the other Westerners; she got to experience the therapeutic and individualization of the practice while honoring the framework. This has helped me teach those who show up in my classes unable to do the strict militant version of ashtanga that is popular today.

And another thought on Parampara, I do agree in the importance of following a time tested practice that has many years of showing benefit to mankind; however again there are always shades of grey. On the other side I have always said Yoga Certifications mean nothing -- it is pretty easy to get one . . . and the worse, or less experienced, a teacher is, the more they rely upon and push their certifications. If you want to know if a teacher is credible -- take their class, speak with them, ask questions. Similarly with the Parampara . . . if you lean on it too much you are relying on that to prove your worth instead of your actual teachings.



If the teachings or "new method" of Ashtanga Yoga is sound, then it will carry on. If not, the Jois name will carry the new method for a bit . . . Then ashtanga will fade away or go back "underground" with little pockets of ashtangis all over the world practicing together :)