

Cindy's Yoga Class: One Student's Perspective

Practicing yoga with Cindy for almost seven months was one of the most rewarding things I've done in my life. The benefits of yoga are well known; finding the instructor who is right for you is another story, though. Cindy is that instructor for me. And I say "is," even though I am no longer able to practice with her due to my recent move to Upstate New York. Here's why:

Cindy came recommended by a friend, so my expectations of her and her work were really high. But they were met—even exceeded. What I like most about the way Cindy teaches yoga is her philosophy that yoga is for everyone. She always says, "If you have a body and if you can breathe, then yoga is for you." She doesn't just say that; she *does* cater to anyone, no matter their age, fitness, flexibility, medical problems. Because her classes are small, she can really focus on each individual's needs and gives one-on-one instruction and attention all the time.

In Cindy's classes students always begin by turning inward and focusing on their breathing through a short meditation. Since the breath is such a big and important component of any yoga practice, Cindy makes sure to remind everyone regularly to focus on their breath. After the beginning meditation, we would usually do at least a portion of the joint-freeing series exercises, which I found really helpful in releasing the tension that has accumulated in my body between class sessions. Then we would continue with the asanas. Before every new asana we would learn, Cindy explained its benefits, different ways of doing it, and how each of us with our limitations should approach it. For example, if someone in class had knee or wrist problems, Cindy would adjust the asana to that person's needs. Also, she teaches the asanas gradually, something different (and better) from other instructors I've worked with. For example, most beginner classes start practicing sun salutations right away. But Cindy slowly incorporates the asanas as her students progress in their practice. We learned the cobra, the plank, and other poses—and their importance—individually, and then we gradually put them together into sun salutations. To me, the natural progression makes more sense—and feels like the proper way—than just doing the whole sequence right away. Students can internalize each pose, get comfortable, and build endurance safely. Cindy ends every class with at least a 15-minute-long deep, therapeutic relaxation. It's never rushed. I left every class relaxed and rejuvenated and ready to take on the world.

But now I'm in Buffalo, New York, with a new yoga instructor. When, with Cindy's help, I found her, I was able to integrate into my new class quickly (thanks to everything I had learned from Cindy). I still hear Cindy's voice whenever I practice, and one "Cindy Reminder" I repeat to myself often is to "learn to accept my limitations and my uniqueness." That's what yoga with Cindy is; that's what every yoga practice should be. You don't need to be in a "perfect" pose. The pose you're in at that very moment is perfect.

Another thing that I learned and am grateful for is that nothing in yoga should ever be painful or uncomfortable. If it is, you're not doing yoga. As Cindy always stresses, the first principle in yoga is non-violence, and we should all translate this into non-violence to ourselves.

Thank you, Cindy. For making my yoga mat such a wonderful place to be. Namaste.