

Why Cindy, Why Yoga and Health

More than a year ago a friend recommended Cindy and Yoga and Health to me. At that time I was a graduate student, which is to say I was frenetic and stressed, tight and achy, forgetting things—from important appointments to where I last laid my car keys. I had precious little time to study, read, and teach (all the things that graduate work requires) and *no* time to exercise and relax (all the things that living a quality human life requires).

“Do yourself a favor,” the friend said. “It’s an hour and a half per session—find this time and you’ll avoid a total breakdown.”

She was right. Every hour-and-a-half session restored me to me.

No More “Pieces-Parts”

Practicing yoga with Cindy faithfully once or twice a week reminded me of priorities. “Pieces-parts” is a phrase Cindy likes to use. It’s a phrase that refers to how our culture (myself included) typically segments our lives and our approach to our own health care. Rather than “pieces-parts” (how school and work priorities used to come before my own personal relaxation needs; i.e., race to class, prepare to teach, hold a marathon grading session, meet my essay deadline, read the next chapter, and maybe stretch before bed, *if* I get a chance, and don’t forget to take a headache pill when the whole process overwhelms me) Cindy’s guidance broke through my “pieces-parts” thinking: my very approach to life needed critical change.

“Breathe and Observe”

For an hour and a half, two times a week, I joined Cindy’s small class (some mornings I had her all to myself!). I listened to her calming, reassuring mantra: “Breathe and observe.” From our beginning asana (comfortable seat), through every pose, as we slowly and progressively built strength and stability in our joints, our muscles, our concentration and focus through breathing and observing the infinitesimal changes. Soon enough my own composition students were telling me I seemed so calm and happy. It’s true, I was. I was getting more sleep at night, breathing easier, deeper, and more fully during the day. I was *present*, my mind more fully aware of what I was doing, right *now*, as opposed to skipping ahead to all the things I needed to have done before the day was over. Slowly, my “pieces-parts” thinking moved into one continuous thought of my body and my mind and my activities as inter-related, as part of one process. My goal had become (and remains) to breathe and observe. While my daily tasks did not shrink or lessen, my perspective shifted—my life became more manageable because my body and my mind were looser and less stressed, at the same time stronger and more tolerant.

“It’s Not Supposed to Hurt”

To say that practicing yoga with Cindy saved my life might seem dramatic, but it’s true—the mindful practice of breathing and observation combined with thorough stretching

helps me every day to be a less harassed, more thoughtful human being. My slower breathing has brought down my blood pressure. And Cindy's patient and watchful eye (a nurse's critical, caring eye) assures me that my postures are correct for when I practice our pain-free-and-effective yoga poses at home. Every day we meet she reminds us to stretch more fully, to breathe more deeply—but that “It's not supposed to hurt.” What a revolutionary thing! All my life as a competitive athlete I'd pushed through pain because that was what I was supposed to do to “win.” Yoga and Health is not about “winning.” It's about getting—and maintaining—balance, between our awareness and our body. It's about strength and stability, not through pain or through winning. Rather, through awareness and patient practice. It's about relaxing. It's about rejuvenation. It's about making the most of our lives.

Every time I talk to my friend who recommended Cindy and Yoga and Health to me more than a year ago, I say thanks. It's the best recommendation I *ever* got. And Cindy, like the best teachers and coaches, meets you where you're at, whether you're new to yoga or you've been practicing for years. She's revolutionary that way—helping you, at whatever stage you're at, to make your life healthier and pain-free.