

## Yogis learn how to stretch their bodies and minds

Contributed by Administrator  
Friday, 11 January 2008

Written by former teacher Katie Wilson and CUNY Prep yoga students

These are the words that are heard over and over again in CUNY Prep Room 4, as students breathe, bend and twist their ways into the world of Yoga: "A slow deep inhale through the nose and even exhale through the mouth." The word "Yoga" generally evokes mystical images of human pretzels, levitation, far-off lands and wild Kama sutra positions. Yoga is a philosophy of awareness, intention, kindness and balance, stemming from Indian Hindu culture of 5,000 years ago. The poses are just a portion of the practice. Being a true Yogi is an art, philosophy, and science. It is a holistic way of being, not a striving to overcome or achieve. Yoga culture drifted across the globe from India to the United States in the mid-1960s and became rooted in those Americans seeking an evolution of consciousness (hippies, like Ms. Wilson). Now people are 'doing' Yoga in practically every gym, studio and school in the U.S. More recently, Yoga has become a common word in American households. Russell Simmons does it. Madonna is a Yoga beast. Andre 3000 is into Yoga and a vegan diet. Even Beyonce rocks a yoga body.

So what's the hype? Like most things in life, you must try it to truly understand it. CUNY Prep students did just that, in a Yoga class held this past fall in Ms. Wilson's class. The aim of this class was to break down the mystique of Yoga and get students interested in their own health and well-being. Each class began and ended with a meditation/relaxation session guided by Ms. Wilson. The core of the class involved stretches, strengthening and poses. Hopefully, students will get hooked on Yoga and commit the skills gained in CUNY Prep Yoga to their daily lives and future healthful practices. Below are testimonials and reflections of students who have participated in CP Yoga:

"Yoga allows you to become one with your body, mind and soul. You become one with the energy around you and with the energy from different life forms. You become one with the world. Yoga helps you concentrate. It stretches your body in an unusual way. You learn about the control of your body. You practice control over yourself. Each day, when you practice the same positions, you position yourself better and better."

Rebecca Esoff

"Before taking these yoga classes, I studied ballet and didn't exactly pursue the profession. Yoga got me back into paying attention to my physical and mental discipline. Well, more mental, to be honest. For me, it's very hard to remain mentally focused because I endure so many obstacles at home. So, I have someone like Ms. Wilson to train my breathing and show me ways to clear my mind."

Jessica Gonzalez

"Yoga has been an interesting experience for me. I have not been avidly practicing the philosophy of it, but the few times I have been a guest in the class, I have enjoyed it. It stimulates the body and relaxes the mind. It calms the mind through breathing and focus and stretches the body through contortions. The philosophy of yoga is appealing to me and there is a strong possibility that I will follow it in the future."

Frank Nieves

"Downward facing dog is definitely a hard position unless you're used to being comfortable with your face down and butt in the air. But who am I to say what is comfortable and what's not. Whoever would have thought that these strange looking positions would create this type of relaxation for the mind, body and spirit. This is really the purpose of practicing Yoga: to free the strong resources we have on the inside as well as the outside. Yoga goes way beyond your body. It is as much about learning to think with crystal clear logic. Becoming supple in our bodies as well as our minds is the key to practicing yoga. We, young men and women from urban communities, have a lot of issues to deal with. Practicing yoga is one way to overcome all the madness of our lives. A famous yoga philosopher named Patanjali said that yoga's purpose or goal is "to cultivate the experience of equanimity and to unravel the cause of negativity." Yoga is transcending my mind, body and spirit to a whole other level. If you commit yourself to Yoga, it can do it for you as well. We can't function in this world without it."

Christopher Rodriguez