

How to Choose your Yoga Teacher and Why you should Care

Yoga is now a large industry in the United States and yoga teachers abound in every environment - gyms, fitness centers, workplaces, community centers, parks, and studios. It seems that every week we are bombarded with new classes, new styles, and new teachers. But what are these Yogas and who are these teachers? How do we make a safe and informed choice about the yoga we might practice when “offering yoga” is just another advertising scheme?

First we might ask the question, What is Yoga?

Yoga is an ancient, holistic discipline originating in India. It involves much more than the physical postures (asana). Yoga is a work in - not a work out. The practices of Yoga brings the practitioner closer to their own true nature. Yoga involves the process of learning how to direct our attention. Through the commitment to the practices of Yoga we can learn how to be present in all areas of life – to live in the now. Yoga becomes a mirror through which we see ourselves as we truly are and it provides us with a set of tools through which we can develop our character.

Why should you care about your yoga teacher’s training?

It is important to empower yourself with information that can help you choose an appropriate yoga teacher. It is helpful to know that your teacher will be able to prevent injuries, help you progress at your needed pace, and encourage you to develop a life-long, sustainable yoga practice.

How are yoga teachers trained?

The first thing to know is that there is little to no regulation for most yoga trainings and certifications in the United States. The Yoga Alliance has set some guidelines, 200 or 500 hours of training with a registered program, but these programs can vary from weekend retreats to 2-year schools. The “RYT” that is used by most “certified yoga instructors” is merely a registration of these hours, which could include classroom time, on-line class time, reading of articles, etc.. But unless you ask specific questions there is no way of knowing how much actual yoga experience your yoga teacher may have.

How is Iyengar Yoga training different?

Iyengar Yoga teacher training falls outside the Yoga Alliance registry qualifications, requiring much more rigorous and intense training and oversight. A potential Iyengar yoga teacher first must have practiced Iyengar Yoga for 6 years to even be considered for assessment towards certification, being first and foremost a student of Yoga before becoming a teacher. Only after three years' study and developing a relationship with 2 overseeing teachers, may a student begin the certification process. The Iyengar Yoga assessment process itself mirrors very closely the ancient lineage system of yoga where prospective teachers are carefully observed and evaluated as they demonstrate Asanas and Pranayamas and as they teach a class of students.

With this lineage system connected back to India and the master of Yoga BKS Iyengar, Iyengar Yoga stands alone in its approach to the certification of yoga teachers. As a prospective student of yoga, you are guaranteed that a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher has passed through this rigorous process and is knowledgeable of all aspects of the Yoga discipline. For more information <http://iynaus.org/teach/teach>.

Be aware and ask questions!

There are competent and amazing teachers in many yoga styles and traditions, just take the time to ask the needed questions. Any good yoga teacher will have many years of yoga study involving all aspects of Yoga: physiology, anatomy, and philosophy. Effective teaching comes from effective practice. Look for some efforts toward certification and an interest for continuing education.

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Lawrence, a two-year, 500 hour, teacher-training program at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco and apprenticed with Julie Lawrence. paul is a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher and is currently training for higher levels of certification with Senior Iyengar Yoga teachers. paul is the owner and director of Rushing Water Yoga in Camas, WA. paul@rushingwateryoga.com