

Learn and Live: Yoga, Media, and You

By Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

I've been browsing through some yoga-related websites and magazines lately, and I consistently see artful images of beautiful yogis, men and women who look like gymnasts or acrobats, performing complex poses while sporting stylish yoga pants and tank tops or leotards. Sometimes the yogies are even naked, using light and shadows to dramatize the pose.

While the healing powers of many of these poses are undeniable, I want to assure all practitioners that **these postures, while sometimes fun to aspire to, need not be fully achieved in order to experience the profound benefits of yoga.**

I can understand how some people find the media-fueled images of yoga inspirational. Indeed, achieving the full expression of a pose can be an incredible boost. And yet more than a few of you have expressed to me that, based on the way yoga is presented or advertised, starting or continuing a practice can be discouraging and daunting.

One of the aspects I find most interesting in yoga is the idea that **the poses which seem simple actually present some greater challenges**, and often that is where the "practice" of yoga truly lies.

Think about it: It's easier to concentrate on what you're doing and "be present" when you're standing on your head. But standing on your feet in *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose), which means both feet on the floor, arms at your sides, eyes open and looking straight ahead of you, is something many of us do every day without thinking about it.

Keep in mind, *Tadasana*, like every other pose, can be modified for people who are not able to stand on both feet.) So when your yoga teacher asks you to stand in *Tadasana* and let your worries fall away, that does not always come so easily!

So enjoy those artful, media-driven images of yoga if you wish. But keep in mind that ultimately, they exemplify only a fraction of what practicing yoga is truly about. Finding examples of how your physical (*Hatha*) yoga practice can inform your every day life can be where the true magic of yoga happens. Come to the mat. **Focus on what can be your greatest teacher, your body**, and whatever you learn is yours to keep.

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