

Yoga: It Doesn't Have to be All or Nothing

By Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

I am running a 12 week creativity workshop at the Initiative for Women with Disabilities (IWD) at NYU Langone Medical Center. The workshop is based on the seminal book *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron.

Cameron writes, "Most of the time when we are blocked in an area of our life, it is because we feel safer that way."

The same can be said of the practice of yoga. Going upside down or into a back bend can feel intimidating, as can walking into a yoga studio or a higher level class for the first time. But remember, it doesn't have to be all or nothing.

A coworker at IWD told me of a woman who years ago had a strong Hatha (physical) yoga practice, despite her disabilities. She demonstrated in classes and came to class often, despite her condition deteriorating over time. Staff watched her go from practicing on a mat to practicing in a chair, then in her wheelchair. As the years passed, she slowly lost the use of her limbs, until one day, she could only practice using her eyes. But still she came to class.

As I watch the women participating in the *Artists Way* workshop open their awareness to their own creative desires, I think of all the ways in which the practice of yoga opens us up to ourselves. The practice of art and the practice of yoga come down to paying attention, to our bodies, our desires, and ourselves.

There's a lot of talk about yoga and "bliss" or "enlightenment", which seem like far away and unattainable ideas. The truth is the practice of Yoga can become a way to "rest in motion," and a sense of hope descends upon you that you never thought possible.

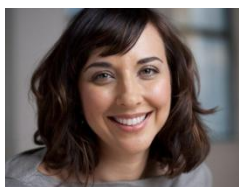
The Broader Perspective

Consider taking a small step in your yoga practice towards something you didn't think possible. Buy a book. Research a class. Try a new teacher. Pay attention to feelings and thoughts that come up. Then take another step.

Cameron writes, "As we lose our vagueness about our self, our values, our life situation [and our bodies], we become available to the moment...until we experience the freedom of solitude, we cannot connect authentically. We may be enmeshed, but we are not encountered."

Yoga is not an all or nothing deal. It's just one step, one forward fold, one curve of the spine, or one twist at a time.

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Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT, is a licensed social worker and certified yoga teacher. She provides private yoga instruction, individual cognitive focused

counseling, and integrative mind-body work. Additionally, she facilitates mind-body workshops and educational seminars on reducing stress and promoting relaxation. She currently provides mind-body counseling in an outpatient wellness center at NYU Hospital for Joint Diseases to women with physical disabilities, and yoga therapy on inpatient oncology and general medicine units at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City. For more information, visit www.yogalenatherapeutics.com and www.IWDwellness.org