

Yoga & the Real World: Letting Go

Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

I've been finding myself engaging in many **inspiring conversations** with people about where they have been in life, and where they are now. A common theme: Nobody has expressed a belief that they are right where they thought they would be 5 or 10 years ago. I have to say those are just the stories I love to hear, because **we never really know where we'll end up!**

Some of these conversations have been with people who are caring for loved ones who are ill, transitioning through major life changes such as moving, a new job, or new addition to the family. Even the owner of the yoga studio where I practice was telling me of his circuitous route of how the tragedy of 9/11 led him from being a large business owner to where he is now, teaching and spreading the power of yoga to his community.

I was spending time with a yoga-teacher friend recently, and he was expressing his desire to take his teaching out of the studio environment and into the Real World. I related to what he was saying, because while the studio can be viewed as merely a space, it can also come to signify a discipline and itself become attached to certain meanings and expectations.

What I gathered from this discussion, from my friend and also for myself, is **sometimes we must come to a place of Letting Go in order to move forward**. Yoga, translated as meaning "to yoke" or "union", can be something we only practice in class and on the mat, and it can also evoke a closer examination on how we may limit ourselves, our thinking, and behaviors.

Uniting our discipline to practice and reach for an outcome, and our willingness to Let Go of the results, in essence is Yoga. It is honoring your self, your body, and acknowledging what you truly need, whether that is with food, rest, activity, or Letting Go.

I thought this was important to write about because **as we move through the process of life, it is always helpful to be conscious of where we are right now**. It is a skill that can be honed through the practice of yoga, or any exercise for that matter. Before you move into the next posture, check in with yourself. See if you even feel like doing what you planned

today, and make sure you are properly set up for your next move. Beeja Bennet, author of the formative book *Emotional Yoga*, writes, "Before you begin any exercise, always take a few minutes to recognize the place from which you start...each day will be entirely different, because YOU will be different."

That is yoga, in the Real World.

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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. Alena's approach takes into account negative thought patterns, eating habits, sleep hygiene, and body image. She currently provides mind-body counseling in an outpatient wellness center at NYU Hospital for Joint Diseases, and yoga therapy on an inpatient surgical unit at Beth Israel Medical Center.

If you are interested in learning more about yoga, stress reduction, and wellness, please contact Alena Gerst

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