

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? *by Shannon Patterson*

Here is what Denise wrote to me when I asked her if there was a particular theme for the newsletter: “No theme. What do you love about yoga? Write about that.” My immediate thought was, “Wow! Where do I start?” Aside from the obvious, like family, friends, pets, chocolate, I have never loved anything more than yoga. Yoga has been the longest and steadiest love affair of my life. I have shared my yoga path with many teachers and styles, including Bikram “hot yoga”, Forrest Yoga, Power Yoga, Viniyoga and from time to time I still visit these old “friends” but Anusara is my soulmate. Here are a few things that I love about Anusara Yoga.

Silly little yoga poses. I had a teacher in San Francisco that used to talk about these “silly little yoga poses” and how really miraculous and even somewhat ridiculous it is that they can change our lives. A little movement, a little breath, a little grace and you get profound transformation. And, it’s the kind of profound transformation that happens, for the most part, easily, sweetly and dare I say, almost despite me. All that I need to do is show up and the yoga works its magic. It’s hard to believe that it can get any better than this but in fact, it does because I can count on it. These silly little yoga poses work their magic every time. Guaranteed. No fine print. I always leave class feeling better. Anusara makes it even sweeter because it is a yoga of heart, joy and grace. I love that.

Debunking the “no pain, no gain” theory of the Western World. A little more about easy and sweet profound transformation. I came to this “aha” moment while reading an article for school where they stated that (emphasis is my own), “New knowledge would then be changes in those patterns of relationship, *changes which could occur only at “the edge of chaos”*.” I knew where they were coming from and on some levels I agree. In fact, what I love about many of the Shiva stories is that he is always at the boundaries and the message of these stories is that it is at our boundaries where we discover new possibilities. But, in this instance, my body spoke louder than my mind because my silly little yoga poses have taught me a simultaneous but radically different truth. Change, no, better yet – *profound transformation*, can occur at boundaries that are also places of peace, sweetness, and grace. I love that.

Everything I need to know I learned in Anusara yoga. Feeling for the alignment that takes me deeper in my yoga shows me the way to go deeper in my life. For example, in twists, the deep alignment and access to the pose comes through drawing my head back and leading from my heart and my core i.e. my depth. Or, everything shifts when I do inversions and my heart goes above my head. Or, how leaning more into my back body opens up my front body and allows the whole pose to expand. I had a teacher that said that our back body is about our relationship with our self while our front body is about our relationship with others. So, then, it is through leaning into my relationship with my self that I can open my relationships with others to a more expansive and deep place. Every moment on my mat invites me and lets me feel the sweet strength and grace of trusting myself and leading with my heart and soul. I love that.

The 3 S’s of Anusara. The Anusara principles Sri (or, shri), Satya and Svantantra are more obscure and I, in fact, found them buried in the back of John’s teacher manual. When in doubt, he said, do that which is life-affirming (sri), truthful (satya), and freedom-enhancing (Svantantra). I fell instantly in love with these principles and I use them to guide me when I am confused – confused about anything from boyfriends to career moves to yoga poses. Combine the 3 S’s and the first Universal Principle of “Open to Grace” and really, there is the lightning rod for all decisions in my life. Simple to say and a little more complex to apply, which means that I am invited again and again into my yoga practice. I love that.

A Kula of Kalyana-Mitras. I just recently learned this term *kalyana-mitra* from my teacher, Douglas Brooks, who said it is “...one of the ancient ways yoga tradition describes an “auspicious friend” - one with whom we choose to share a spiritual passage that is personally auspicious and mutually worthwhile.” I love knowing that wherever I go in the world I can reach out to the Anusara community and be welcomed into a kula of auspicious friends. I love John Friend for creating such a community because I cannot go it alone. As Douglas says, “The possibility of fulfilling our divine experience is available to every individual but such potential requires more than extraordinary individual effort: it requires us to participate in each other’s experience and to advance ourselves in relationships that further empower us.”

So I thank you, my dear kalyana-mitras for being there for me. Namaste.