

# Practicing at Seattle Yoga Arts

*by Monica Wellman*

Before I discovered Seattle Yoga Arts, I had attended yoga classes on and off for twenty-five years in the Seattle area. I was discouraged with being a long term beginning yoga student and I decided it was time to take my yoga practice seriously. I knew I needed an experienced teacher and an approach to yoga that was well grounded in spiritual tenets. As sometimes graciously happens in life, I was given exactly what I asked for in Seattle Yoga Arts.

I now practice Anusara Yoga on Sunday mornings with Denise. One of the things I noticed when I walked into my first class at the studio was that most of the other students were close to my age and they all looked so...well, healthy and even happy. At Seattle Yoga Arts, you can feel comfortable as a "seasoned" yogi. I felt immediately at home with the atmosphere of seriously playful excitement. The closest I can come to describing the energy in the room is a little like the feeling I remember from years ago on Halloween nights before going out trick or treating. Though I was new to the class, I received many welcoming smiles and nods as we pulled out our mats and props and began to stretch. One tradition Denise has is to introduce yourself to the students around you before class begins. I have found these little introductions to be a wonderful way to strengthen my sense of community in the class.

Denise begins with a short talk on the focus of the particular class. These talks come from years of study and experience with yoga and they reach deep into a place in me that welcomes recognition. I feel I begin each class in a community with a common spiritual awareness. This sense engenders a feeling of calm and softens any competitiveness around the physical aspects of the yoga practice. So we begin by shedding light on grand thoughts and honoring an intention bigger than ourselves.

Anusara yoga is both strenuous and graceful. After practicing Ashtanga yoga, I felt I needed instruction in the principles of alignment surrounding the breath and muscle action. After two years at the studio, I have learned enough to have a glimpse of all there is ahead to know and practice. I now have tools to study my physical strengths and weaknesses. Because the classes educate me both physically and spiritually, I do less but accomplish much more in my home practice.

Denise's teaching is clear, inspirational and very often funny. I can in one moment be breathing fully, sweating profusely and on the verge of a giggle. John Friend says the way to measure the efficacy of a good yoga teacher is to gauge how students feel about themselves at the end of a class. After class I feel strong, physically integrated and centered, lighthearted and pleased. I could say Seattle Yoga Arts has found *me*. My plan is to stay awhile and continue to enjoy yoga more than ever.

*Submitted with heartfelt gratitude to my teacher Denise Benitez and her teacher John Friend.*