

# WHAT WILL BE MY VINYASA TODAY?

By Julia Smith

*Vinyasa: a sequence of poses  
that flow together seamlessly*

I am a newcomer to Denise's yoga classes and walk away almost every time with a new frame in which to live my life with a little more ease and joy.

A big one came to me in the first class of this session when she instructed us repeatedly about how to move through a pose. "Take on the form of the pose", she says, "relax into it. Soften. When you soften you get bigger." I begin to feel the shape of the pose in my body, gravity and my extension working to stretch me. My body's first response is to tighten; and then her words guide me into the softening to enter more fully into this particular way of being in this moment. Some poses are more comfortable than others, each evokes a different mood or attitude; but what they have in common is the invitation to get present to what is here now.

"Now contain the pose, pulling your arms into your heart, your legs into your low abdomen" Ahh, she ups the ante! I am always amazed at what happens with containment I feel myself more, the possibility in the pose more, and the dynamic tension between relaxation and the strength and definition that can arise out of relaxation.

And then the clincher "Take an action!" she admonishes. "Extend, open, sink more deeply into the pose. Give yourself to the pose as though this is the last time you will ever do it! In a moment it will dissolve and be lost forever. Express yourself fully in this moment while you can." That gets me every time! What a call to a little personal victory- taking a risk (one that I can handle!) to stretch the envelope, inviting me into the mystery of an edge I haven't reached before.

I relish this approach to poses in class. As we move from one to the next, I feel like we are traveling through different landscapes of body and mind - different experiences shaped by the different asanas. A little tour of body and being in 90 minutes.

The teaching has stayed with me outside of class as well and is transforming my life and work. I have had a lot of calendar anxiety lately as I try to manage a number of projects simultaneously in the first months of the new year. I can feel overwhelmed as I consider the various tasks, appointments, conversations, design sessions in a given day. This attitude is exhausting, takes the joy out of what I am doing and makes me less available for spontaneous, playful or intimate exchanges when opportunities arise.

Denise's distinctions for engaging poses has become a metaphor for transforming the tasks of my day into a series of curious encounters that I can give myself to fully before they dissolve and are lost forever. This is mindfulness in a fully embodied form:

Workshop planning for two hours: what is the shape of the pose? How do I enter into engagement with it? What happens if I breathe, relax and just let myself settle and soften in to what this next period of time will be about? When I feel myself losing focus, how do I contain and act to move deeper into the task at hand? What does it mean to give myself fully to it and then release it? Release with the satisfaction of knowing that the pose is complete, its time to move on to another.

Next it might be a conversation, a challenging encounter with a coworker or catch up with my husband as we transition from work at the end of the day: How do I give myself fully to this pose? What is its shape? How do I bring myself present? Enter it softly? Open my heart? Sense in to what it is calling forth from me in the moment?

Using this metaphor as a frame for my day gives a fluidity to what otherwise might seem like disconnected pieces: riding the bus pose, seeing a client pose, planning meeting pose, email correspondence pose, debriefing the day with my daughter Lauren pose, fixing dinner pose. The day becomes a vinyasa, "a series of movements that flow seamlessly one into the next."

Now, as I turn to my calendar, I can be curious and excited about the vinyasa I will design for myself from day to day. Tasks become the structures of engagement in which life happens. There is movement and flow as well as strength and focus. And I can feel almost as good at the end of each day as I do when I walk out of Denise's class!