

Rodney Yee on Yoga as a Way of Life

Simple Strategies for Staying on Track

by Marlaina Donato



Renowned yogi and international teacher Rodney Yee, of New York City, has maintained an inspired yoga practice for 37 years while juggling career obligations, fame and family life.

While the benefits of yoga are increasingly well known—from stress reduction and pain management to a more limber body and inner peace—Yee is also aware of the challenges to maintaining a consistent practice. Here he shares insights on the pitfalls encountered by both beginning and advanced students.

“My advice is to first get rid of self-berating behavior, including judgmental inner dialogue. In many aspects of life, we are constantly measuring ourselves against a standard, which is a waste of time and energy,” says Yee.

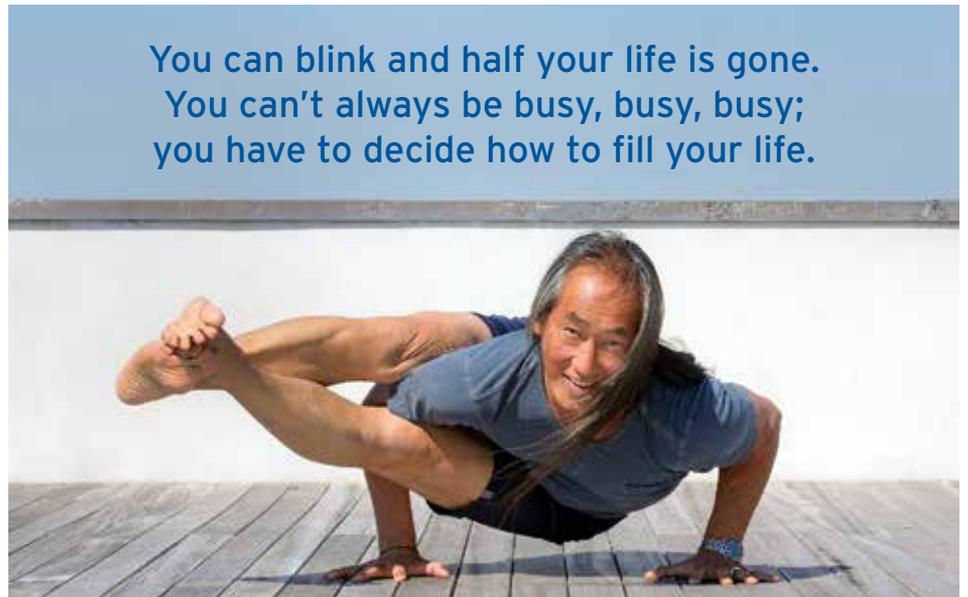
With a professional background in classical dance and gymnastics, Yee decided to give yoga a try at a nearby studio when he craved more physical flexibility. “As many people do, I came to yoga for a reason. I was a dancer with tight joints. After the first class, I couldn’t believe how I felt. It was not at all like an athletic high; I had a sense of well-being and knew what it means to feel peaceful and clear.”

For people with jam-packed lives, finding time for exercise can

be daunting. Yee suggests a relaxed approach to scheduling yoga into a busy day. "As the rishis [Hindu sages] say, we shouldn't 'try' to meditate, not try to force a natural state. To say, 'I have to do yoga,' just puts another thing on our to-do list. Sometimes discipline is needed, but another part of discipline is not about force."

Different approaches to yoga abound, and part of staying motivated may include exploration of a variety of traditions as individual needs change due to lifestyle, health, interests or simple curiosity. Yee reminds us to go with the flow and follow how we feel in the moment. "Different schools of yoga exist because each offers something different. There is a form for all of our moods and a practice for how you feel at any given time."

Reflecting on how his own practice has evolved through the years, Yee recalls, "In my 20s and 30s, my yoga practice was arduous, including three to four hours of strong, physical work and a half hour of *pranayama* [breath work]. Then for 20 years, it involved a lot of teaching. Over the past 17 years, my practice has become more subtle, with a focus on sequencing and meditation; it's about how to do this all day long in the context of my body and my life; about being both centered and in the world. In some way, we're always doing yoga, as we already take 20,000



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breaths a day. From a philosophical and ethical point of view, yogis have no choice but to practice."

Because many American women have found their way to a yogic path, men often assume it's primarily a women's niche. But yoga has been a male practice for nearly 2,500 years in other countries. Yee encourages men to not feel intimidated. "Why not try something that can help you improve your business, family life and even your golf game?" he queries.

While Yee believes in a no-pressure approach, he also suggests inviting ways to foster consistency. "If you are just beginning, set aside a half-hour

before going to bed or get up a half-hour earlier. Also note that pain is less to be avoided than learned from."

Wisdom can come from dedication to a yoga practice. Yee's philosophy is, "You can blink and half your life is gone. You can't always be busy, busy, busy; you have to decide how to fill your life. As spiritual teacher Ram Dass counsels, 'Be here now.' Train yourself to bring body, mind and heart together and fully drink from that."

Learn more at YeeYoga.com.

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