



OM meets... Anne-Marie Newland

Sun Power Yoga founder Anne-Marie Newland talks to OM

How did you start yoga

My mother introduced me to her local yoga class in 1972; I was bored to tears. And then I found Iyengar in 1976 during an annus horribilus, but it did not hold me. It seemed empty for me. In 1983, yoga found me in my psychedelic designer clothes shop in London's Kensington Market. At around 2pm, I had an epiphany. And the rest is history. I left my rock and roll life behind and walked into the light.

How did it affect your life

It changed my life dramatically. I found I was able to adopt the principles of yoga by dealing with things a lot better. I had a very hot temper and the meditation and chanting at the Sivananda centre in Notting Hill was working. People always expected me to fight them. I stopped and I still got what I wanted but with reason and skill. This was powerful stuff.

Tell us about the particular style of yoga you teach

After many years of apprenticeship, which included teaching for some years without asking for payment, I built up a solid following. I studied

Iyengar with Maxine Tobias, qualified with Swami Vishnu Devananda in Canada, London and Berlin, and graduated at the Sivananda Vedanta Yoga centre in south India in 1984. I then studied Astanga Vinyasa with Beryl Bender Birch in the UK and followed Bryan Kests enigmatic and powerful style. I ran classes in local clubs, pubs, and schools; often stepping on cigarette ends and beef burgers left on the floor. All in all, I did my homework and by 2001, I had blended all I had learned by taking elements of all three styles - and Sun Power Yoga was born. I use all the subtle mind and breath work of Sivananda, the technique and alignment taught in Iyengar, and, as an ex ballet and contemporary dancer, this was a crucial element to good practice and teaching for me. Astanga Vinyasa yoga was missing that touch of flow, grace and heat. I began teaching this eclectic mix and style to my classes and it became so popular that students began to ask if they could train to teach it. So, in 2003, we opened The Sun Power Yoga School. I started with seven students that year and now train 50 a year from all parts of the world. Apart from my four children, this school is my greatest achievement. We celebrated our 10 years anniversary on January 1, 2013.

What do you enjoy most about teaching yoga

I am old school; teaching is a vocation. I was forced into taking my first jazz dance class in 1974 by a well-known choreographer now, Arlene Phillips. I really thought this was the pits. In those days, you were either a dancer or, if you didn't make it, a teacher, but maybe that was my own prejudice because after that very first class I was hooked. I've been teaching some sort of body work ever since. I am passionate about teaching because that day when I was 19 I discovered I could really help people feel good about themselves and give clear instructions as to how they could achieve a dance, an exercise and to put something of themselves into it. Teaching is a practical magic.

What do you think makes a great yoga teacher

A great yoga teacher is a person who works from a genuine passion for the work they do. It doesn't matter what you do in life as long as it makes you feel good about yourself and it's authentic. Don't play at being a yoga teacher, be it because you genuinely want to do nothing else. That's the same of any job you do but I know I am particularly lucky to have found my passion so young in life. Purpose has to be the Holy Grail; if it's just a job then consider you still haven't found your purpose.

**How do you fit your own practice around your teaching work**

Apart from being a single mother-of-four, doing the washing, cleaning, taxi-ing, and being the main breadwinner, I do what I can each day by practising what I preach: be as kind as you are allowed to be, try to work things out with your children, give them some space and always do a job to your best ability. Make each second matter, don't waste time, use it or be in it, it's all yoga. I work six days a week and I can get on the mat straight after I have unloaded the dishwasher.

Do you have any favourite or memorable moments from your time on the yoga mat

Yoga for me is not about only being on the mat, it is a huge, inclusive concept of theory and life. So when I am on the mat I am able to bring all those elements together. My breath is in time with my mind and my mind in rhythm with my body. Creating Sun Power Yoga came from this union and a moment of intuition and inspiration. I had been thrown out of the Astanga elite crew that morning by letter for not being a purist. I smiled to myself and realised I did not need approval or permission, just the courage to let my yoga experience take shape, then flight, and it did. Sun Power Yoga was born that day on the mat.

What do you do when you're not teaching or practising yoga

I practise yoga in all I do or say: I get it wrong, I get it right and some days I am plain horrid and others divine. I run my school, which is very big now, and as founder and company director, I am hands-on in all aspects. On Saturday, I don't open the computer, and spend time with my youngest teenage child. We chill out together. Sundays are our big teaching days and if I am abroad I am on the job 24/7. I don't do hobbies. I love my work.

What would you say to those that have never tried yoga before to encourage them to take their first steps

I don't encourage anyone unless they have shown interest and asked me about it. The most common statement I hear is 'I am not supple so I can't do yoga'. Dispelling people's idea of yoga because of images and media is sometimes tough. I never told my children to do yoga, it was my path but there is no reason it has to be theirs. Having said that, now they are grown up they all practise it apart from my teenager who says 'I hate yoga, it's ruined my life'.

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Any words of wisdom for your fellow yogis

Yes; be honest, allow your weaknesses to show as well as your strengths, admit when you don't know something and be a real person. Pretending to be perfect is so hard to keep up. If you need help, ask, or you will always seem to be coping; maybe you are, but if you aren't, then communicate it to your friends and family. Being human means that we are not meant to be alone. We are aspiring to reach a higher mental attitude but in the end it's your heart that makes you feel your life.

Why do you think people should practise yoga

I don't think people should practise yoga. I think people can find their own path in life and it just so happens that yoga is mine.

Find out more about Anne-Marie Newland at: sun-power-yoga.co.uk

