

Lotus YOGA

Teacher Highlight

Emily Parzybok

Emily has taught at Lotus for several years. She loves literature, has traveled the world, and believes yoga can change the way we think about ourselves.

You've said that yoga is an excellent tool to change one's "patterns of thinking." How?

I came to yoga looking for a "perfect body," or a workout routine that would help me lose weight, which I think is really common, especially for women. People come looking to work out and reshape their bodies. While it's definitely that -- I love the physicality and the exercise element of it -- I think it helped me to reframe that, and rather than focusing on how I looked on the exterior, to internalize it a little bit. To notice the experience of being in my body. How did I feel that day? Did I have good energy? Did what I eat agree with me? Internalizing it helped me to become a little more body conscious and aware in a way that changed what was important about what I was noticing in my body. Then I also practice a lot of meditation and I teach a lot of mindfulness, especially in my yin classes, because if you're still for five minutes, it's an opportunity to practice that mindfulness. I feel like a lot of those techniques that aren't always included in the physical asana class but are often integral to it are really powerful mind tools. So I do a lot of reading of neurobiologists who talk of meditation as a tool to combat depression, or to shift unhealthy patterns of thinking, or to work with things like eating disorders and body dysmorphia. I think in that way yoga can be a really powerful way to sculpture our minds.

So you see meditation as an important aspect of yoga, and also you've mentioned the importance of taking time to yourself. How might these be beneficial to a yoga practice?

A lot of times when I tell people that I work in politics and that I teach yoga part time, they say, "Oh wow! That's such a great balance!" I think it is, actually. But I also think that our yoga practice often just manifests other elements, or other aspects of our lives. I love a really healthy, active, physical practice. A strong practice. But I think Americans and people who work in high-paced jobs are drawn to high intensity, fast, and demanding practices. We love those things because rather than balancing out that element, they're the same: demanding and high paced. While I don't want to critique those as bad practices, because I love them, I think the actual balance is that slowness and stillness that we don't really get a lot of in our day to day. Even though I still practice those demanding sequences and love them, I found that yin yoga, restorative yoga, and really slow and mindful practice are the things that actually balance out the way that I live my life. I think I became more conscious of that because I lived in Namibia on an abandoned sheep farm for about a year and a half and I was plunged from America into that, one of the slowest paced places on earth. No electricity or internet. Very remote. So coming back to this, I was really cognizant of how incredibly fast paced my life was here. That helped me to see how I was out of balance, and how I needed the slowness for introspection and quiet that I'm not getting anywhere else in my life.

You've traveled to over 50 countries throughout the world. What drew you to do that?

I have a travel bug, and sort of always have. I like travel because I like discovering different viewpoints. At the end of the day, I'm a really intellectual person, and I really enjoy that part of myself. In travel I enjoy noticing what's normative and true in one place is not that way in another. If we live at this pace of life we take for granted that's how it is. But then you go other places and people have totally different conceptions of what time is, and how it's measured, and how it works and what the rules are, and what the etiquette is. And I think it's really interesting to question our own norms. And I think travel is a really good way to do that. I love that about it. Being around people who play by fundamentally different rules.

As an intellectual person, you have a love of literature… How might literature integrate into your teaching yoga?

That's a good question. I used to read excerpts to my class, and then have a theme around them. I think things like travel and literature are ways of being in a situation and sort of looking at it again. I was recently talking with someone I'd been teaching from this perspective, about the Talmud, which is a rabbinical discussion of the Torah. The idea is that you read one or two short sentences or paragraphs, and then you find something new in it each time, sort of like discovering the novel aspects of the same reading. I think literature's like that. And travel is like that. And yoga is definitely like that. It's not so much about a new thing. It's rather about what I'm bringing to the experience this time. Where am I at now? What is it like now to be here? And in that way those experiences share this commonality, and I think I draw from that.

Anything else you want to add?

I really found out a lot about my teaching through the Lotus community. I love the way it's been cultivated. I think the studio leadership is so intentional, which has created this really great space and community of students. It feels super inclusive, thoughtful and balanced in and of itself. I've learned a lot and changed my teaching a lot just based on the practices I've learned from teachers and students at Lotus. And I really appreciate that.