

Hi, Jay,

I felt compelled to write this and send it to you, in case you might want to post it on the bulletin board, put it in a later newsletter or just read it for yourself. :) (Yes, I give you permission to share it with whomever you see fit.) First of all, I really must thank you for the encouragement, support, kindness and inspiration that you and your staff of teachers provide for me. I wanted to mostly comment on what I have learned through these challenges I've completed in the last seven months.

Journey of a budding yogi

From October 2006 to May 2007, I suffered from many overwhelming (to me) personal losses in my life. At times, I felt as if I was drowning in my grief and just kept facing each day one at a time, knowing that eventually, the grief would pass and leave me a stronger, more whole person. In those losses, I noticed a dip in my self-esteem. So, one of my crazy notions was to take a pole dancing class to improve my confidence in my sensuality. It worked and I found the classes to be athletic and fun! Nicole (my pole dancing teacher) suggested that I try Bikram yoga. Thus, a week later (in mid-June), I came to your studio to take a class. I have always loved working out and been very fit, and I like trying out new exercise formats.

Clearly, I liked it! I enjoyed the intensity of the yoga and the mental focus required in class. I soon realized that I was able to leave my grief at the door, most of the time, and I felt that the yoga was helping me heal emotionally. In addition, the physical workout aspect of the classes was intense enough for me to experience improvement in my fitness. About a month later, you started the 30-day challenge, and I readily signed up--not only for the physical challenge but also for the mental and emotional healing for myself. On day two of my challenge, I broke my toe at home. It was a clean break all the way through the bone and caused great pain while walking for a few days. I kept coming to yoga with some expert advice from you about how to alter some postures until my toe healed (which took about 5 months total). At the end of the 30-day challenge, I decided to keep going, making it a 60-day adventure. Then, I extended it to 100 days. I needed that level of challenge to change my body, because 30 days wasn't enough for me, and to increase my emotional/mental stamina. By the end of that (in late October), I was truly healed emotionally, over my grief and back to my usual joyful self. I was filled with gratitude for the opportunity you provided me and grateful to myself for sticking through it all.

After the 100-day challenge, one day I was joking that I would soon do another challenge, and Rebecca suggested that I try a 15-day double challenge, i.e. doing two classes per day for 15 days in a row. I thought about it for a month or so and then decided to take it on. I teach at the University of Utah, and I got about three weeks of a holiday break during the Christmas season. So, it was the perfect time to do the 15-day challenge! I took Christmas day off from working out and started my challenge the next day. After about 5 or 6 consecutive days of double classes, my body was pretty exhausted. I remember one afternoon class (the second one for that day), I was so physically tired that I ended up crying for half of the class. My physical exhaustion gave way to an emotional outlet for me. Since I finished that challenge, I can look back and see how incredibly beneficial it was for me. Physically, I felt a bit tight and tired for a good portion of those two weeks. However, my yoga practice improved substantially from this endeavor and I started realizing those improvements perhaps a week or two after the challenge ended.

One thing I know has changed for the better is my breathing. I have always breathed through my mouth, in normal life as well as in the yoga studio. I do have some legitimate medical challenges with my nose and breathing, but I have been setting clear intentions to breathe through my nose. With Amanda's great suggestion to give up dairy and setting my intentions, I finally had a breakthrough with my breathing (during the 15-day doubles challenge). I can get through almost an entire class now with the right breathing! It took about three weeks for the dairy to get out of my system before I started seeing results. I actually didn't expect it to help, but I figured I should at least give it a try, like any good scientist would do to test a hypothesis. Later in January, I went to New York for four days on vacation with my daughter, and I ate dairy there because I wanted to be free to experience everything. My breathing went back to its old state of being again. Then, it got better after another week of no dairy. It remains true that I am able to breathe through my nose during class, since I haven't eaten dairy products in a while now. I'm grateful for the advice Amanda gave me and happily surprised that it worked. :)

Another point of gratitude is the friendships I've formed at the studio. There have been several classes where I wasn't sure if I'd make it through, and being surrounded by loving people/acquaintances/friends gave me energy to endure it. Overall, one of the best lessons I've learned in pushing way past my comfort zone is in how to be gentle with myself. One overriding goal of mine in life is to have balance in all ways. Each person's personality naturally disposes them to either be hard or gentle on themselves. Some people are too far on the extreme of gentleness and need lessons in pushing themselves a bit more, and then there's the group of us who are typically too hard on ourselves and need to learn when to be gentle. It's fascinating and a bit ironic that in pushing myself to a physical extreme, I learned how to be more gentle. I am now truly accepting and loving to myself if I need to sit a posture out. It is in the humbling of myself that I learn about compassion. And, the extent to which I can be gentle and loving with

myself is the same level of compassion I can give others in my life. Ultimately, the greatest benefit I've received from enduring these physical challenges is more love, freedom and detachment. For me, it follows much of what the teachers say during class and what I believe is truly the essence of yoga--to use the physical realm to make forward gains in the spiritual realm.

Thank you so much for this opportunity!
Kelly