

Becoming a Yoga Teacher

by Debbie Avani



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I hope you find these pages help in your decision as to whether you enroll on a Yoga Teacher Training course – for me it was one of the most important and transitional times of my life. I remember loving every minute of it and not wanting it to end – so as well as questions to be considered before you embark on your journey I have included some tips for after it has all finished.

Why enroll on a Teacher Training course?

Something magical and mystical happens when a group of high-intentioned individuals make the decision to gather together for 200 hours with the purpose of uplifting their lives & expanding their consciousness into radical authenticity – wise words by Silvia Mordini!

It can only be described as ALCHEMY..... With the support of your teaching community you are able to wake up to the potential that is inherently yours – enter the laboratory that is your life experience and mix the potions that you want to create your very best life going forward.

On a physical level – its often found that transformation takes place at an accelerated pace, what would normally take years of solitary practice to attain takes a much shorter space of time. During a teacher training course you tend to feed off of each others passion which encourages a sense of reaching into your best potential! It's like the very best yoga class that simply goes on and on.

Swami Satchidananda once said *“Yoga believes in transforming the individual before transforming the world. Whatever change we want to happen outside should happen within. If you walk in peace and express that peace in your very life, others will see you and learn something.”*

On a mental level – self-study, known as svadhyaya is at the heart of all yoga practice and especially during a teacher training course. Transformation is not always easy, as it takes a firm commitment to learning more about yourself. The teaching community on a course provides a safe haven to engage in open-minded self-exploration – offering loving support and an atmosphere in which freedom of self- expression; creativity and passion for life are totally encouraged.

In order to effectively teach using your most authentic voice you must know yourself well, this in turn gives rise to inspired, creative and joyful teaching. A good course should endeavour to help you unravel, understand and evolve their own uniquely personal teaching style that is a reflection and a manifestation of their heartfelt and authentic experience.

Surrender! – Being in the safe container of a teacher training course and taking a break from your daily life, unplugging from the pulls and pushes of technology, work, family, can begin to release old & binding habit patterns. This letting go of mental bonds and ego provides an emotional transformation of surrender and when we surrender and feel safe then healing begins.

There is also something very powerful about surrounding yourself with people who don't know the encyclopedia of your past. They see you as you really are and somehow recognise your potential for greatness. This helps to reinforce your willingness to change for the better.

Building community - Even when the course is complete you will find life long friendships are formed with like-minded people who will support your growth and your new lifestyle choices.

How to choose your Course!

What makes a good teacher training course – is a somewhat subjective question! Here are a few questions to consider.

- **Is the course within your budget?**

Not just considering the course fee but also additional costs that may occur. Are you required to take additional training or private tuition as part of the course? Will you need to buy books or other course materials? Will you need to arrange for childcare if sessions are during school holidays? Will you need to book accommodation if the course is too far to travel to for each session? What will the travel costs be?

- **What is included in the tuition costs?**

If there is a retreat offered then check that it is included in the course costs – there can often times be many added extras that bump the cost of the course beyond that which is advertised.

- **How many people will be enrolled on the course?**

This will be a very personal consideration as to how many people you feel comfortable with in a training situation – but it is worth considering. If there are say 30 people on the course will you feel lost within the mix of so many voices. Also how many course tutors will there be?

- **What is covered during the course?**

There are many courses out there to be considered so looking at course content is important. What is it you feel you need from a course – a high percentage of physical work – a high percentage of philosophy – or a mixture of the two? The brochure may be stunning and tick all the boxes – but as this is probably one of the most important decisions you will make then it is always a good idea to chat with the course tutors before enrolling.

- **What style of Yoga will you learn in the Teacher Training?**

It's important to know when enrolling in a program what style of yoga you will be learning, is this a style you are comfortable practicing yourself and would like to teach in the future?

- **Do you resonate with the teacher?**

This can be an important question if you feel you need guidance during the course – maybe go along to a few of the teachers classes or workshops and see if their teaching style fits. Or organize a one to one session or chat to feel if you have a connection with that teacher.

- **Are you learning one set sequence or how to intelligently and creatively sequence?**

There are teacher training programs that only teach students one sequence to memorise and this sequence is specific to teaching just at that studio. This is fine if you plan to only teach at that studio or within that system, but if you have plans to move beyond that studio or teach private clients one day you may wish to get your training elsewhere.

- **Is there home study?**

Being a part of a course is the easy bit to manage, you diarize and keep that time free, however home study takes discipline and extra time! Do you have time, free from family/work commitments to realistically set aside to complete any assignments required? Do you have time for personal practice and meditation? Is this the right time in your life to be taking on this commitment?

- **What percentage of the graduates goes on to teach?**

This can often times be a telling sign of whether the course is effective. Some may come to the course for personal benefit, but how many do go on to teach. Maybe find their classes and experience their teaching as a gauge of the courses effectiveness.

- **Is feedback available from the previous students?**

This is a great way to get a feel for the flavor and style of the course. See if you can read some testimonials or maybe speak to those that have been on previous courses.

Why is accreditation important?

Did you know that Yoga is unregulated anywhere in the world and there is no governing body to control the standards of Yoga Training. This is why Yoga Alliance UK was setup, they are trying to educate as many people as possible to ensure they are aware of the importance of maintaining and supporting high standards to ultimately safeguard everyone involved – teacher and student alike.

Importantly Yoga Alliance do not run their own Teacher Training courses so they are fully free to support their members in a non biased basis, which is important to maintaining independent regulation of Yoga in the UK.

Yoga Alliance ensure all members are properly insured to teach and that the courses accredited have met the highest standards set by the organization.

Why choose a Yoga Alliance Accredited Course?

If you enroll on a course offered by a registered Yoga school this means that school has met very high standards. It will be taught by a senior Yoga teacher that has taught for a minimum of 6 years and has at least 4000 teaching hours to their credit.

The course contents will have met Yoga Alliance standards in terms of contact hours being taught as well as what exactly is being taught and how it is assessed. The structure of the training course and company is properly set up as a business with procedural documentation in place to support the student and the course.

What to expect from your membership with Yoga Alliance?

If you complete a Yoga Alliance certified course you will be accredited as highly qualified Yoga teacher. This shows that you have been taught to a high standard and are ready to start teaching worldwide. It is important to have this accreditation, since it will set you apart from other Yoga teachers and show to your potential students that you have been properly trained. You will also gain.

- A license to use the initial and logo RYT200
- Comprehensive yoga insurance to teach yoga worldwide
- Insurance to teach additional therapies
- Access to excellent CPD workshops to develop your own teaching
- A free members profile page to help promote your teaching
- Opportunity to be a featured teacher on the Yoga Alliance website
- Reduced rate advertising in magazines
- Discounts from www.theyogashop.co.uk
- Full online telephone support

After the course finishes - setting up classes

To be a success, you need 20 percent facts—earning a yoga teacher certification—and 80 percent business savvy plus a whole lot of passion for your craft. One of the biggest obstacles for newly fledged yoga teachers is the daunting task of actually setting up that very first class and then to encourage consistent attendance.

It can sometimes be quite a big come down after the course has finished as you no longer have that dedicated support that you have got used to over the past year, by meeting, exploring and talking about your practice and passions with a like minded group of people. You suddenly find yourself alone with lots to plan and do. Prepare yourself for this prior to the course finishing – by feeling into what it is you really wish to achieve long term – and then slowly working towards achieving that goal in realistic stages.

Always try to remember why you took the course in the first place – your love of the practice and all that is Yoga and maybe take a few of the following questions into consideration.

- **Have you thought about how you would market your classes?**

Think of how effective, flyers, posters or adverts in the local papers or magazines might be. Research what works well for others in your area as well as finding out prices and what you can afford.

- **Have you thought about where you might teach?**

Would you like to teach at a local studio that is already up and running? If so check their pay structure and how many people are allowed in each class as you may not wish to teach large numbers straight away. Or would you prefer to teach locally, hiring a hall? Halls are often well booked so do your research and check prices and availability well in advance - also what is the policy regarding bookings – are there deposits etc

- **Are you tech savvy?**

Can you set up mailing lists, databases, how will you keep in touch with your growing classes. Have you set time aside to create a newsletter? Are you on facebook or twitter or other social media sites?

- **Do you know how to make a website, flyers and posters?**

Have you considered how people will find out about you and your classes? One of the best ways is to build a website and optimize it well. Can you do this yourself or do you know of any good web developers? Have you considered a logo or what you would put on a website? Do you have a computer and printer that you can create flyers/posters or will you get them printed elsewhere – how much will this all cost?

- **How will you get students to your class?**

How will you market yourself – there are many classes out there and many teachers. What will make you stand out from the crowd? Think in terms of what you would like to see from a Yoga teacher and start from there. What is your mission statement, how can you get that across.

- **And how will you keep them coming back?**

Besides being a great Yoga teacher of course! - maybe think in terms of class passes that are cheaper than a drop in price. Or special offers from time to time.

It's probably wise to keep the day job for a while after qualifying so as to take the pressure away from making it work immediately. This will allow you to experiment and settle into your teaching groove and still enjoy it rather than panic every time someone doesn't come back to your class! Yoga is becoming increasingly popular in the UK and as more teachers are being trained it is important to ensure you market yourself properly. This means considering your brand, your style of Yoga, how you set yourself apart from others and where you are prepared to work. Its good to sit with these considerations for a while before making any decisions.....

A few more to take on board may be –

- **Administration**

Have your infrastructure in place before you get really busy. Try to be organized and have the right forms in place such as Health Questionnaires and Disclaimer forms for your students to fill in prior to joining class. Any good organization will have templates that you can use. If you are working for a studio ask to see a copy of their procedures otherwise you personally may be liable. It is also good to set aside time for administration – answering enquiries by phone or mail – writing articles – working on class prep – creative time for yourself.

- **Putting money aside for your tax payments**

As a yoga teacher you will be self employed and will need to declare your earnings at the end of each tax year – even if you are in paid employment you will need to fill in a self assessment form. It may be sensible to employ an accountant to handle this for you or seek their advice on what best to do.

- **Get insurance**

The UK sadly is becoming more and more litigious so it is really essential to have proper cover. Check your policy is valid and in date.

- **Continuing your development as a Teacher**

It is essential to always be developing and practicing your own Yoga teaching. The best way to do this is to attend CPD workshops – most training providers have a list on offer. Always check that the workshop you wish to take is recognized by the accreditors you are covered by. Most organisations – such as Yoga Alliance will ask that all RYT200 teachers complete workshops to the value of 8CPD points per year – this ensure standards are maintained.

Teaching your very first Class!

So all the practical stuff has been taken care of and you are stood in front of your very first class – I remember that day well and what was going through my head – something like....

- Would my students like the class I had prepared?
- Would they like me!
- What if I didn't know what to do next?
- What if I froze or forgot the name of a posture?
- What if I couldn't answer a question that was asked.....

Don't worry about teaching – just share your practice!

How do you teach a great yoga class? You simply stop the thought that you are teaching at all!! Share your practice and not your ego.

Let yourself fall into the category of student right along with your class!

When we fall into the 'role' of a teacher there are so many self-imposed expectations. But when we let go of the role of the teacher and just share our passion and love for the practice of Yoga the magic begins. The difference will show in your attitude, your voice, your actions and your intention! Never forget to be genuine – there is no need to put on a teaching persona – let your personality shine through your sharing.

When it is your intent to share, that which is your passion rather than 'teach' – your authentic self enters the room and you can be truly genuine with your students.

Keep gently reminding yourself why you are there at the head of a class full of students – you love it, you are passionate about it – its your life.....

Students will ask questions. It's OK not to have all the answers!

Never feel you need to know it all – let's face it Yoga is a vast science! Rather answer any questions from a space of love and compassion even if it simply means you say "I don't Know".

As teachers we are our biggest students. If open and receptive we are able to hear ourselves as we teach/share and absorb the teaching on a deeper level. And when we simply share our own practice, we may have the answers for some questions, and for those we don't, it gives the opportunity for growth and also humility in our own practice and its depth.

Speak from experience

You love your practice, right?? You have spent many hours on your mat playing with postures and sequences – you already know how it feels. The key to effective sharing is to practice, practice, practice so be sure to know your flow and what you are looking to achieve within a class then the ‘teaching’ part is a breeze. Let go of the need to sell textbook information about the pose and speak from a space of experience.

How does the posture feel? Share that!

How did your journey begin with that particular pose and how did you progress with it? Share that! How do/did you lessen the intense sensation in a forward bend? Share that!

The list is endless, be mindful and observant in your own practice and simply share that.

Keep practicing and learning!

Before you can begin to share your practice – first you must HAVE A PRACTICE! Try not to get so caught up in creating classes that you forget your own personal practice, its important, as this is what makes you shine. The deeper our practice becomes the more energy filled we become – this can act as an energetic magnet to draw other energy bodies into class – like attracts like!

Keep learning from the questions asked in class that you can’t answer, from your students with specific needs – but more so from yourself and your personal dedicated practice.

And gently remind yourself when those self-imposed expectation creep in – that by simply sharing your practice and releasing the ego you step into a space of GIVING.

From that space of giving, all things are possible.

Namaste