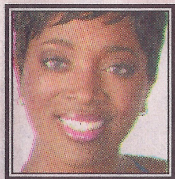


Yoga: An exercise for physical and spiritual growth

FROM TIME to time, I have dabbled in yoga as part of my overall fitness regimen. But at the beginning of this year, I decided not only to make it a regular part of my life but also to become a certified yoga instructor.



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My original intention was to use yoga to teach my toddler about fitness. I thought it would be the perfect vehicle

to introduce him to exercise and would be another way for us to continuously bond as he grows and matures.

After careful consideration, I chose to do my yoga training at

the YogaLife Institute in Wayne. Something about their program resonated with me.

I never thought — not in a million years — that my exploration of classical yoga would test not only my physical capabilities but my spiritual, mental and emotional resources, as well. It never occurred to me that simple yoga teacher training would have me pondering all aspects of my life.

Several years ago, a colleague of mine told me that yoga had totally transformed her life. She subsequently made a career change and opened her own yoga studio. At the time, I admit, I was not really sure of what she meant. Now I think I have some idea.

“Paradoxically, when you learn the mind side of yoga, you receive more physical benefits,

as well as stress management and inner peace. As the yoga movement in the U.S. matures, people are learning the benefits of yoga are beyond just exercise,” my teacher, Robert Butera, told me. He also is the author of “The Pure Heart of Yoga: Ten Essential Steps for Personal Transformation” (Llewellyn Publications, \$21.95).

I agree! Though initially, I admit, I was a tad resistant because I thought it was all and only about perfecting the poses.

Butera challenged my thinking.

“One of the ways of understanding yoga as a complete approach to health is thinking of working out the nervous system, versus only the muscular system” in more conventional exercise, he said. “If you work out the nervous system, the

muscles come along for the ride and the mind-body connection actually gives more strength. Olympic athletes are not tense when they break records. Yoga helps find your center in anything that you are doing.”

The philosophy and reading materials are just what the doctor ordered to strengthen and stretch my body as well as my mind. Though I’m still doing teacher training, I’ve already had several ah-ha moments, realizing that yoga can be a pathway to complete self-realization from the inside out.

While it is true that I have just begun to scratch the surface in my yoga practice, I have discovered that the true purpose, at least in part, of this practice is to remove negative behaviors, thoughts and actions. It will certainly take me a

lifetime of practice to master all of that.

To me, finding the balance, surrendering, managing daily stress and ridding myself of negative thinking and toxic relationships is ultimately all a part of a healthy lifestyle.

My exploration into yoga has me questioning, examining and rewiring my hard drive in a positive way. With much practice and deliberate effort, I believe I cannot only master the poses but ultimately master myself. ★

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