

My Yin Yoga Teacher Training Experience

by Elizabeth Eaton

I've been practicing Yin Yoga for ten years. As a teacher of Yin Yoga, I entered into the Yin Teacher Training believing I already knew everything there is to know about the practice. I'd read all the books, watched both of Paul Grilley's DVDs, and had read *Yin Yoga: A Quiet Practice* two times over. Of course, this mindset is an unwitting and grand set-up for a very humbling experience, and that is exactly what I received from this training.

The terms functional objective and aesthetic cue entered the conversation very early on, as Joe guided us into our first practice. As Joe explained to our group about the dangers of sticking to rigid aesthetic alignment principles, I began to wonder. Not once, in the many classes I had taken, had an instructor encouraged or even suggested deviation from what certain postures "should" look like. In fact, I was routinely being told to sacrifice what felt like beneficial sensations in my body because the posture wasn't being performed "correctly". Not to say that aesthetic cues, which guide you to a posture, are without merit. Rather, as Joe explained, they are merely a base from which you can explore individual movement in a posture to discover what feels good. Or what feels best. Have you ever seen an instructor encourage slumping of the shoulders in cobra or sphinx pose? Although it may be surprising, it may feel really good for you or your student – and may be genuinely beneficial to their physical and energetic practice. And so, on the very first night, Joe began the work of breaking down our conceptual walls to build space for the idea of functional objective. Is your functional objective to stretch the hamstrings? Then why stick to an aesthetic cue that looks great, but does absolutely nothing for that muscle group?

The other aspect of the training that I found fascinating was the comprehensive daily discussion on

anatomy and bone structure, and something that Joe calls range of motion. This is an idea brought forward by Paul Grilley, after studying the idiosyncrasies of human skeletons. Certain protrusions of the bones – for example, in the clavicle's acromion process – can limit

range of motion. He proposes that, at first, the limits in range of motion are probably due to tension in the muscle and ligaments. You're all tight in the hips and groins, so it's really no wonder that you can't do Hanumanasana (splits posture). In fact, you must be holding some emotional trauma that keeps you from going deeper in the pose. Or even better, you're not trying hard enough.

Over the two weekends, we examined our classmates in a variety of Yin postures and performed "range of motion tests" to observe bone structure variation. This portion is what really threw me for a loop: I had been berating myself for years for not being flexible enough to come into Upavista Konasana (wide-angle forward fold), and thought it strange that I could bring my forehead to knees easily in Pachimottanasana (seated forward

bend). One range of motion test we practiced helped me determine that my hip sockets may be quite shallow in the front, which allows the pelvis to move forward quite easily, as long as the legs are together. But my sockets become deeper toward the sides, and literally compress against my femur bones if I fold forward with the legs apart. What a revelation! I have since stopped feeling inadequate in upavista konasana and can rest, right where I am, right where I'm supposed to be.

I know now that the sky is the limit when considering the possibilities of Yin Yoga. With Joe's help, over just two weekends, my depth of understanding of anatomy and Yin Yoga philosophy grew to new heights. And I hope this feeling of humility can last until I see him again next year!

PranaShanti Yoga Centre is hosting Joe Barnett's 30-hour Yin Yoga teacher training during two weekends, January 25-27 and February 8-10, 2013. Space is limited! Early Bird Pricing available. Reserve your spot today.



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