

WHEN THE TEACHER IS READY THE STUDENTS WILL BE THERE



Perhaps I am an 'Old School' teacher, although I don't feel old. I am close to 60 and I'm not all that comfortable with technology. I would much prefer to feel the beauty of Yoga Today in my hands as I relish the articles, rather than to read it on screen. In more than 25 years of teaching I have experienced low points in class numbers and, more recently, sustained highs and both absolutely validate, in my mind, the wisdom of the saying 'When the teacher is ready the students will be there and when the students are ready the teacher will be there'. I switch off to anything that feels like marketing, advertising and branding, especially when it comes to the miraculous realms and sacred esteem in which I hold yoga.

When I joined Yoga Australia National Management Committee and was asked, as part of the work of the Industry Intelligence working group, to look at the Roy Morgan Research 'Yoga Participants Profile' I was challenged. Challenged by

the marketing tones, the idea of investigating people's attitudes, buying patterns and media usage in order to understand them more and know how to reach them. I really wasn't sure about the notion of lumping together yoga students and profiling them, when diversity and individual purpose is what most of us teach in yoga. And isn't yoga intended to give us pathways through and beyond the material world?

When I voiced these concerns with Phoebe, YA marketing manager, she graciously noted that 'Marketing is knowing your purpose and communicating it'.

Now this is something I can work with:

Knowing your purpose as a teacher, means being truly ready to teach.

Taking the broadest, deepest, highest possible view of our purpose in this life brings us closer to our spiritual path, our path to

our true self, whether that self is embodied in the persona of a truck driver, shop assistant, artist, parent, doctor or teacher.

Those of us who complete our yoga teaching training course and feel the urge to teach can feel in various states of readiness. We might know and excel in the techniques of stretch, postures, breathing, meditation and relaxation but does this mean we are truly ready to teach?

We may have had the fortune to come through a training course that has a great track record of teaching how to teach, but does this necessarily mean we are deeply called to go out and set up our own classes?

We can study various aspects of yogic psychology, philosophy and spirituality but does this necessarily mean that teaching is our true purpose in this life?

What makes us truly ready to teach

is living our yoga in daily life. Our regular practices on our mat/in our sacred place are essential. It is, however, our grappling with both the challenges and joys, the tensions, opportunities and contradictions that arise as we strive to weave yogic wisdom into every decision, breath, word and movement that bring us to readiness as a teacher. How we handle every waking moment and our efforts to illuminate and integrate our non-awake states bring us ever closer to our true purpose.

When I look back on my path as a yoga teacher I can see that I have moved forward and back through 3 distinct phases or states and I see these in my colleagues from different traditions and age groups too.

The first phase or state starts towards, or after, the end of our teacher training, when we know that we are not only technically able to teach but that we have an inner urge to teach. We see yoga teaching as our higher purpose, something we want to do even if it doesn't always fulfil the criteria of a job or a business. We are inspired – spirit personified.

Then there's something about teaching that brings us face to face with ourselves as we learn from our students about diversity, individuality, complexity, subtlety, ease and pain, generalities and exceptions, motivation and disengagement, embodiment and absence, focus and avoidance, willpower and disempowerment, consciousness and darkness. When we are in this phase or state, we might be particularly concerned about individual students' reactions, varying attendance/numbers, making ends meet - all very understandable. As we grapple with our teaching and ourselves we come to see that being our self is our higher purpose, higher than teaching. We come to know, in a very real sense, that it is who we are rather than what we do that makes us a true teacher - a teacher who

is ready for whatever and whoever is put in front of us. So whilst we continue to strive to be a better teacher, to earn a living and to tune in to our students and learn through professional development, we see our own personal development as paramount. We start to let more of our own doubts, vulnerabilities, frailties, unresolved issues come to the surface and work through them. Perhaps we question ourselves more and maybe even begin to doubt if we are fit to teach or if teaching is right for us. Ironically, at this point, we just might experience an increase in the number of students who are attracted to us or another door may open that reveals a different path.

This is when we enter the third phase or state of yoga teacher - when we know ourselves to be a vehicle of light/wisdom. When we feel, in a detached way that we are simply, yet importantly, a channel. We identify and follow serendipitous/intuitive connections, requests and opportunities. We might put energy into a course of action (perhaps a new class, workshop, project, studio, helping someone) which feels right even if a little illogical or impractical. We might be surprised about how easily it falls into place or we might find that we hit brick walls or dead ends after the initial flurry of 'rightness'; only to find that there's a side benefit, an unexpected turn that becomes apparent and later, upon reflection we see that this was our real path or purpose. This is when we see that our work as a teacher is a service as well as a business, when we see that the business of yoga, almost by definition, needs to rest on spiritual principles. The yogic wisdom rings true for us:

'When the students are ready the teacher will be there and when the teacher is ready the students will be there'

In Yoga Today, Autumn 2017, Brook McCarthy explained why yoga teachers are natural marketers. When we are a channel for the

wisdom of yoga we are naturally empathic, generous, clear and precise, persistent and creative servers of humanity. All the qualities needed for marketing.

It now seems clear to me that marketing and promoting yoga starts and ends with our self – knowing ourselves and living our yoga. Knowing our audience or target group and understanding the world we operate in is perhaps of secondary importance.*

First and foremost we can trust that:

'When the students are ready the teacher will be there and when the teacher is ready the students will be there'

*Postscript:

This does not mean that we need to disregard market research completely. There are some useful demographics in the Morgan Yoga Participants Profile. In the last edition of Yoga Today we noted that there would be a discussion paper available soon - in some ways this article is a first instalment. We are now working on a discussion paper looking specifically at populations that are significantly under-represented in yoga participation, according to the Morgan report.

Lynn Romeo, Industry intelligence Working Group. ॐ