

Yoga fashions

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Better a Yoga hippie or a Yoga yuppie? Transformation of Yoga in modern times

20 years ago people interested in yoga were usually considered a bit exotic, or in the worst case they were judged as sort of freaks, dangerously influenced by weird, New Age, esoteric believes.

At that time, if people wanted to learn yoga they would have dedicated their life to explore, read, meditate, taking University educations in history, philosophy, anthropology, spending years in retreat centres.

Now things are radically changed and yoga is totally mainstream.

People are still fascinated by what yoga is, but they don't want to learn it, they want to teach it. And they want to make money teaching it. The more, the better. Usually.

I remember at that time we were seeing the asanas (the physical side of the yoga system) as an introduction to the yoga world. These physical exercises were described as a way to train the body to be able to practice meditation.

We were learning that doing the exercises properly we could effect the nervous system and the neuroendocrine system. It was making sense to me. Stimulating the blood circulation in specific areas of the body where there were important glands we could influence to some degree the hormonal production, and obviously the hormones in the body can effect the emotions, and the emotions can effect the mind and our perception of the reality.

It was pretty straight forward. When the body is more relaxed and the mind is more clear, not coloured by heavy emotions and impressions, it is easier to practice meditation and to reach a deeper understanding of our Self.

No need to have fancy yoga clothes to reach this experience at that time. No need to do spectacular acrobatic performances. No need to go in pilgrimage in any specific place. Nor to pay for a 200 hours American certification. It was enough to study and to practice.

The yoga monk that taught me meditation told me that he was going to teach me only if I was promising him to actually meditate, regularly, every day, at least twice a day.

What has changed in the yoga world in these years?

Well, about everything. Yoga now is in the majority of the cases, a way of building up physical confidence. Many people approach yoga because they see it as a way to learn exercises that will make them look cool. Poses that will tone up their muscles, poses that can be used to show skills of balance and physical control, pose to increase grace and flexibility. Pose to be perceived and to feel more sexy.

Meditation is out of the picture (unless it is necessary to promote a yoga holiday in an expensive touristic location, in that case the sexy body of a semi naked young girl sitting crossed legs in front of the ocean is definitely IN the picture…). But it is a different kind of picture…).

The young yoga teachers seem to be very attracted by the idea of becoming yoga stars. They don't want to be Gurus, but they want to have followers, usually instagram followers.

It doesn't matter if they don't know much about the yoga philosophy, cause they know that people are not searching much for that anyway, what will really strike in the mind of their customers will be their ability in jumping (literally) from one yoga position to the other. I have experienced that myself. It is fascinating. I see it almost in all the classes. It doesn't matter much what I say, if I come to a new class where people don't know me, the only way of gaining their respect is to show them the famous jump through the arms, or some other acrobatic exercise. THEN I become a yogi in their eyes.

What can we say about this transformation of the yoga culture?

Well, we live in a peculiar time where a large number of people follows armies of ferocious religious extremists. A time where parties with racist ideologies are sitting in many parliaments. A time where is considered ok to take away rights and money from families and workers to give them instead to multimillionaire international corporations.

So, after all, the pseudo yoga fashion is not really the biggest of the problems and it might perhaps contribute, with a bit of luck, in some case, to open a window toward a natural, universal wisdom.

Nevertheless, I would like to formulate a few open questions to all those people that dream to become yoga teachers, or yoga teacher stars.

What is your goal? Would you do that for free? Which transformation would you really like to see in yourself and in your students? Would you do that if yoga was not in fashion?