

Girl Meets Yoga

....And The 24 Life Lessons It Delivered

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Dedicated to Lin

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Introductions

My first real meeting with yoga was on January the 18th in 2010. I had done some yoga in the past, at home and a few classes while I was abroad, but that was it. Yoga at home was only when I was extremely bored or it rained too hard for me to run. I hadn't found the right place for yoga classes yet either. Then I did an excruciatingly long and hot 90-minute session in a yoga studio in Rotterdam. And *that's* when I really met yoga, and what yoga is supposed to be.

It wasn't very impressive, that first class. It was terrible, really. I was stupid enough to wear a white tanktop that was soaked through within 15 minutes. I was not flexible at all. All I really did that first class was try not to faint. I succeeded in that, but the next day I felt like death warmed up and like my muscles had been blended into a Self Help Hipster Smoothie.

However, that very first yoga class marked the beginning of a period in my life where things started changing rapidly, in all aspects, in a good way.

I'm not going to muse about what a great spiritual journey I'm on (I am just on my way to the fridge probably) or tell you the E! True Live Story since that faithful moment in January 2010. It's just that yoga started *something* for me. A process of some sorts, that I am not really able to define or understand. It's nice, but I have no idea what to call it. Which is why I call it *something*. I like *something*. It entails that I don't know that much as I might want, plus it sounds a little funny. I like funny.

I believe the something is a good thing. Otherwise I wouldn't have coming back to yoga class again and again. I wouldn't have started to practice more frequently, even daily for extended periods of time. Plus, I wouldn't be writing about it if I believed it was a bad thing.

All I know is that yoga has taught me a lot in two years. About a lot of things. I thought that was worth writing down. Maybe you can take my words about my *something* with you. I hope they can comfort or help you in whenever you're in your own *something*.

I turn 24 today and I like to share the things I've learned through yoga practice with you in this book. I hope to make it a tradition to do spectacular things like this on my birthday from now on.

I've always wanted to write a book. This may be simple and short, but it's something I've always wanted to share. I'm glad to be sharing it with you.

Love,

Lianne

First things first

1: There is no such thing as an impossible thing.

I've spent a lot of time in yoga classes where people do things with their bodies that you may think of as impossible. They certainly don't.

Backbends so good people looked into the mirror again from under their own butt (or into it, can you imagine?!) 64-year old women with the legs of 24-year-olds. Pregnant women who were still able to stand on one leg and have their bodies parallel to the floor.

I watched people defy what I previously thought was physically realistic. And it always reminds me of this quote in Alice in Wonderland saying: "Sometimes I imagine up to six impossible things before breakfast!" I saw impossible things, 90 minutes a day. Sometimes before breakfast: 06:30 AM classes.

Seeing impossible things for 90 minutes a day? That does something to you. Good things. Because if you see impossible things on other people, the concept of impossible starts to fade.

I saw myself too. I saw myself in the mirror, moving my body in ways I used to think were impossible. Millimetre by millimeter I got closer to things I had always labeled impossible for my body to do. And as millimetres became centimetres, whatever concept of impossible I still had would be outdated more quickly than I had defined it. When you realize the things you tell yourself are impossible aren't anymore, that's when the idea of impossible really becomes obsolete.

I can now do things physically I hadn't even imagined two years ago. I mean, I get my leg up in the air and everything. It's very impressive, if I may say so myself. Leg, air, up, impressive.

If I can get my body to do these previously impossible things...that must mean my mind is just as capable of achieving things I formerly labeled as impossible as well! That thought makes me happy. I like the idea of possible over impossible. That idea is the reason this book is in your hands.

It's so comforting to know that impossible things are very rare. A lot of things are frightening or intimidating, some are actually quite a stretch! But really impossible? Hardly ever the case.

It will do you good to release every belief you've ever had about the human body and what it's capable of. Release all your beliefs. Or at least loosen the reigns on them, so they could be changed if you're shown differently.

Those ancient ideas about yourself, about your discipline, flexibility, endurance? So limiting. Let go of everything you believed before about your abilities, whether physically or mentally. Have you always thought you wouldn't be able to touch your toes, do a 100 push ups in a row, write more than 15 000 words on a single topic, go abroad by yourself, go scuba diving?

Let it all go. You don't have to think of it as impossible things. These things stop being impossible; they are added to the list of things you could do. You don't *have* to, but just know that you could.

2: Work with the present. The Now is perfect.

I used to be obsessed with the yoga in my future. Thinking about the next class: how brilliantly I'd do of course. Or I'd be dreaming up the next couple of classes I would take that week, and how great that much yoga would make me feel. Or maybe the hundredth classes after that, and how rockin' my abs would be after that. Always thinking ahead.

I'd be in a yoga class and think so much about the yoga I would pay absolutely no attention to the yoga I was doing. Oh, sweet (and stupid) irony!

The problem is that when I'm thinking ahead, *I forget that I'm already there*. I even forget I'm actually already in a yoga class in the first place, right that second! I could get so preoccupied with a scenario in the future, whether it be next week or next year, that I forgot the scene I was in. Which is such a shame! I can do a lot more by optimally doing that yoga class *I'm actually in*, at that moment! Fantasizing about a potential class I might be in later in life does not burn calories, or make my muscles grow stronger, my skin clearer, my organs cleaner or my mind more focused!

And sure: it's great fun to daydream about the wonderful prospects of the future from time to time. You should definitely keep in mind the things to look forward to, to be excited about, to motivate you. But it becomes limiting and dysfunctional if it makes you forget your present. Because it is only in that present you could do great things from which you immediately benefit, right now and later.

A lot of people have this problem. The ideal future distracts us so much we don't do anything in our present. Which means you don't use your time the way you should. It's better to do things in the present instead of telling yourself you'll do them in the future. By keeping your head in your ideal future, you're never going to get it. Well, this is End Procrastination class 101, so listen up.

You need to pay attention to the present and what you could do *right now*. You have got to accept where you are now, and from that point act as constructively and positively in that Now as you can. Because that's where you can actually improve your life. You've got to work with what you got and all we got, right fucking now. That's how you become great. Not by daydreaming.

3: Stop labeling yourself. Who you are and what you do is perfect as it is.

Before I started practicing, I kind of thought I had a lot figured out. For starters, I thought I was 'pretty good' at yoga. Which come to think of it now is a weird thing anyway: How is one 'pretty good' at yoga? I just figured I was kind of limber, in okay shape and not lazy, so I labeled myself as pretty good. Which makes sense because I like being good at things. Everyone likes being good at things. Everyone wants to be labeled 'good' at what they do. Brilliant is better, sure, but we just want to be good at things.

As I practiced more, I stopped thinking about yoga practice in terms like that. Sure, I had a really shitty or stellar class here and there, but overall I just did yoga. That's all I do now. I do yoga. And I don't do it in terms of 'good' or 'average' or 'bad', or 'I should be better by now'. It just is what it is. Because of that, it simply couldn't be better. I think it's perfect just the way it is. Even though I fall out, have sore muscles from time to time and sometimes get distracted by somebody's cute yoga top. It's all just fine.

Same with life. I used to think I'd have a bestseller by the time I was 25. A villa, too. Chances of that happening any time soon are pretty slim, but I'm okay with that. Because I do what I love. I write every day and I live in a beautiful apartment with a great guy. Isn't that wonderful just as it is?

I just want to write. I just want to be happy and sit at my dining room table with my laptop and a cup of tea. I already get to do what I love. So isn't that just perfect as it is? Shouldn't I just enjoy that instead of labeling it as 'not there yet', 'not enough' or 'failure'?

And that's the same for you. Whatever it is you're doing. Whoever you are. Be it your job, your sport, your relationship. You're doing the best you

can, and you're learning, and you're making progress. You're not going too slow or too fast or too anything. You're exactly as you should be.

And that does not mean you shouldn't strive for brilliance, excellence and other spectacular things. Neither does it mean you can't speed up your process when you want to (or slow down). Quite the opposite: when you stop labeling, you stop being judgmental over who you are and what you do. That creates so much space for progress and development.

Body Issues

4: Your body loves you.

I remember the soreness after my first class. I could hardly lift up my arms without feeling like I was being pulled from three different angles. As mentioned in the intro: Self Help Hipster Smoothie, all muscles in the blender. What an ordeal.

But the hurting stopped. This would always happen: after every class I took, even when I first started out and went once a week, once a month. However tough it was on my body during or the day after, the hurting always stopped. The pain was always temporary. The pain is always temporary. Your body works damn hard to take care of you the best it can. It just needed a little time to regroup. As I did more yoga, I found my body needed less and less time to recover for every class.

Even after three days of class, thirty classes in thirty days, double classes. However stiff or sore I am, the pain always goes away. Hell, I once did five classes in one day and lived. My entire body went haywire the next day because of the detoxification effects (headaches, cramps, exhaustion), but I was fine the day after that. My body would need some time to adjust, with a few unpleasant side effects...and then it would bounce right back. Every single time.

I started noticing that resilience and flexibility. What this body could handle. The way it just took everything and dealt with it. I was impressed.

It made me think of other things I had done to my body before. Unlike yoga, these things hadn't been good for me. Eating too much. Eating too little. 8 tequila shots in an hour. 5 cups of coffee and a caffeine pill when I needed to finish a final essay during my time abroad. Working out for two hours a day. Not working out at all for weeks. That stupid (and singular) water fast I tried to do while only drinking black tea and smoking Marlboro Lights.

My dear body had always been trying to take care of me while I was doing all this stupid shit to it. Whether it was filtering out the alcohol, detoxing me from caffeine, coping with my lack of nutrition, exercise or proper sleep: it was always doing as much as it biologically could. My body was always cleaning up my messes after me. Whatever idiotic thing I had done, my body always had my back, trying to restore balance and health in the aftermath. I had just never really thought about it like that. My body is designed to take care of me. Bodies are the ultimate caretakers: however they can, they will try to take care of us.

So now, whenever I'm not feeling very well, whether it's stiffness, soreness from exercise, a hang-over, a headache, a tummy problem, I know my body is just solving a problem. Afterwards I can move on as healthily as possible. And I'm thankful for that. I can feel the love.

Our bodies go through a lot for us. Whatever our bad habits are, our bodies try to cope as much as they can. Whatever we do to ourselves, our bodies take, and do damage control to boot. Our bodies are designed to take care of us with all they have. They're working towards what's best for our entire being, for us as a whole.

Your body loves you. It wants you to live. It's only trying to keep you as healthy and undamaged as possible. Whether it's bad eating patterns, drug addiction, lack of exercise or self-hate, your body is just trying to cope. It's just trying to reduce the negative impact of what you do, elevate unpleasant symptoms if it not diminish the negative effects of your negative lifestyle choices. It's only doing that because *it loves you*. Your body loves you, do you get that?

Realising its resilience made me think about how I treated it, but also how I felt about it. If my body loved me so much that it would work this incredibly hard for me, how I could justify not loving it back?

5: It's good to love your body back.

Me and my body had come to a relative neutral point before I started doing yoga. I wasn't *in love* with how I looked and felt, but I was okay with it most of the time. As long as I felt that way, I tried to do all my stupid shit in moderation. That worked for a while. At the time, it really was the best I could do. That changed during my yoga practice.

I wanted to do something for my body instead of the other way around. As I saw how much my body had gone through for me before, I learnt to appreciate it on a whole other level. I felt like doing yoga classes was a way of treating it right, better than I had been able to do before. I wanted

to do this for my body. Paying it respect.

The positive response of my body to yoga classes was (and is to this very day) overwhelming. During class, even if it was rough, it felt great to breathe, to use my muscles and to relax whenever I was supposed to. After class, I felt clean, pure and energetic. With the risk of sounding like I'm talking about my body as if it's a child: Yoga made my body really happy. The teachers always should say you should thank yourself for coming to class afterwards. My body's happiness was a loud and clear 'thank you'. A signal that I was doing something right and I wanted to do better by my body. So I kept coming.

I started doing more classes. My body kept responding to it, increasingly positive. More energy. Better sleeping patterns. A bigger appetite, but for healthy foods. I shed a layer of fat and exchanged it for muscle tissue; this made it look like I had lost twice the kilograms I had actually lost. Every time I looked in the mirror I saw how good my body responded to my acts of love. That made me love my body even more.

Yoga still makes my body really happy. It's better than everything else I've ever felt and it's probably the main reason we get along so great these days.

I hope you can get along with your body. If you really can't love your body yet, at least respect it. Be kind to it to your maximum ability. Nurture the relationship you have with your body; you'll be needing it for the rest of your life. Whatever it is you have done to it before, your body is willing to forgive you. I know mine was.

Show your body acts of love and acts of kindness. Whether it's with a period of rest, better sleep, more exercise, healthier foods or just a more positive attitude towards your own reflection: *show your body you love it*. You'll see soon that your body will respond, and it will be a positive response.

Love your body back. You'll be amazed how much happier you're going to be.

6: Move into your body, you were supposed to live there anyway.

Before yoga, I used to live all the way up in my mind. I loved the view but I used to be very unaware of my body. This is a bad, bad thing.

I'd exercise, sure, but while I ran my miles I'd pretty much just daydream and plan my day while listening to music. Which was nice: I'd sort my thoughts, get my sweat on and make my butt tighter, but it never really got me out of my head. Yoga did that.

Mind you, not always in a soft, friendly "here kitty kitty" way. Plenty of times I was yanked into place like a puppy on its chain. But it was worth it. I am in this body for a reason: I should be aware of it. I should be aware of the things happening in it. It's the only way I can really take care of it: If I don't know what the fuck is going on in there, how am I supposed to better my ways?!

Once I did yoga and started to become more conscious of my physical being, I started noticing things. Shitty things, such as sugar headaches, the real awfulness of hangover, caffeine jitters, my stomach being all scrambled after a night of drinking, feeling sloshy after eating three (okay, thirty) more bites than actually fit in my digestive system, bloating after too much soda. Ugh.

When you notice the bad things happening in your body because of things you did, you have incentive not do them (that often*) anymore . And if you don't notice the effects of the good things, you won't have reason enough to do more of them.

Because good things become more clear too. How much more lucid and light you feel on living foods**. That green juice and salads give your body energy in a better way than coffee and sugar. Having a way more productive day after working out. Better focus, mood and cravings. Feeling better after yoga. Higher quality of sleep after yoga classes. Better *anything* after yoga classes, really.

Thing is, these things were always there; I was just too preoccupied with the things going on in my head to notice my body. I always kind of zoned out and only thought about stuff instead of feeling stuff.

After a year of relatively intense yoga practice, that connection between my mind and body is better. The energy flows better. So whenever I come out of the first posture of class, I get this absolutely delicious rush of energy throughout my entire body. It's like a little tingle working its way through my entire system that wires me to be completely one piece. I like being one piece.

We are all designed to be one piece. That's when we are at our best.

**Let it be clear that I'm no saint.*

***Living foods are vegetables, fruits, and sprouts. Not baby animals.*

Tough Loving

7: Crying should not keep you from trying

I know this defies my previous point of not labeling my yoga as anything, but for the purpose of this point I'm going to stray from it.

There is this one posture...*oh man, I suck at it*. All I do is think "oh God oh God oh God oh God"...and then I fall down. Everything else is going just fine, but I'll just flop down with this one.

I was very relaxed about it before: for over six months I've been shrugging it off as something that will come eventually. But just the other week, after the billionth time of hitting the floor, I was fed up.

I just got so angry: why wasn't I able to do it?! I know I have the technique down, I can do the rest of the postures just fine, so why is this so fucking hard?!

I could feel tears of frustration run down my face as I got back up. I had one train of thought: *Fine. If you need to cry, go ahead and fucking do it. But it does not excuse you from practicing. Try again.*

So I tried again. Now, this story would be more Academy Award Worthy if my little motivational inner speech had worked and I stayed in the pose on pure will power but alas. My life is not always a movie. I still went "oh God, oh God, oh God" and then fell to my knees. Again.

But I felt a little better. Because even through tears, through negative emotions, and all these negative thoughts like "I can't", "I'm not worthy" and the previously mentioned "Oh God, oh God, oh God", I still kept on trying. I can still try. As I keep trying, I'll eventually be able to pull it off.

That's not only true for me, but also for you. In whatever situation! So you have a very stressful job? It's fine to cry about it. What's not fine is not doing your work because of it. So your personal trainer is kicking your ass. You keep going. It's hard to take care of your sick parents, but you don't stop, do you? No. You push through. You may cry, but you always try.

The only real reason to quit anything is if you don't want something anymore. Just because it's hard and this takes an emotional toll on you, doesn't mean you should stop.

8: If you really want it, you will do it.

For a while, I wanted to practice yoga so much that I completely forgot to make excuses not to go to class.

I'd go if I was still sore from previous class. I'd go if I was tired, sleepy, hungry, thirsty, moody, sick or had a tough day ahead of me. If I knew a favorite teacher was coming to teach at 06:30 AM, I didn't care I only slept for 4 hours; I would go. If I knew the 20:00 was my only shot at a class that day, I'd still go to class with a full stomach from a family dinner and just bear with it. I'd still go to a class if I had to wait for my tram for 20 minutes in the pouring rain. I got sick during the last week of that challenge for charity: I *still* dragged my ass to yoga.

That's when I really learnt how that stuff works. When you feel that burning desire for something, be it yoga, running a marathon, completing a novel, finding the perfect salad shaker: you get a one-track mind. You want it...and so you do it. Other things are less important.

I love the phases where I feel this way: wanting to go so badly I don't even think of reasons not to. It makes everything so easy.

I like the saying "'Obsessed' is how the lazy describe the dedicated." I like the idea of people being obsessed about the things that are good for them, that make them feel happy. What's going to be your obsession? Whatever it is, want it like its you're starving and there is one last cookie in the jar: Do what it takes to get it.

9: I deserve exactly as much as I'm willing to work for.

I didn't get skinny from two yoga classes a month. Nor did one half assed session a weekend earn me the ability to inhale four brownies without gaining weight*. While I have always wanted to be thin, healthy and eat loads of brownies without them turning into love handles. I mean, who doesn't?!

But I didn't get any of that until I started practicing yoga every day for months. After a while I could go with less yoga classes a week without becoming a One Woman Love Handle Parade, but by that time I'd probably have a solid 100 hours of yoga under my belt. Only when I had sweated, stretched, grunted and spend a big amount of time and made a lot of effort, I got the body, the health and the limitless brownie points.

You get my point: *to cash the cheques you need to do your labor.*

It's very easy to say you want something. We all want lots of things. Talk is cheap. You want to be a professional dancer? If I know for a fact you don't come out of the studio every day all sore and sweaty, I am not impressed. So you proclaim you want to get all straight A's yet you spend every night out drinking with friends instead of studying? I roll my eyes at you (and will probably call you a dumbass behind your back, sorry).

Your plans don't get the job done. Unless you are working for it, you're not going to get it and what's more: if you are not willing to work for it, you don't deserve to get it.

**Side note: Not every day.*

Teachers' Wisdom

10: Falling out is learning how *not* to.

Yoga isn't always graceful. Not for me, at least. Sometimes I'm not strong enough to hold on and fall over. Sometimes I get distracted by shiny objects and tumble towards the floor. I love my butt, but it's gravitational pull lands me on my yoga mat every now and again.

Teachers somehow never really seemed to judge it. Somehow, I'm in there all foolish and uncoordinated and they never say: "you unworthy inelegant failure, get out of my classroom!"* Instead they say to me, and to anyone else who falls, tumbles or loses balance: "That's okay. Falling out, is learning how *not* to".

I always thought you only learn to do something right by just doing it right. But there is an entire process before that! How would you know you're doing it right if you hadn't done it wrong before?! I can't always pinpoint what I did wrong exactly at that moment, but I eventually notice patterns. Whether it's in movement, focus, breathing, eventually I find clues. And when I do, I use them to do things differently. I would never have found any of that out if I hadn't landed on my ass so many times before.

If you fall down 24 times, you're gathering information on what doesn't work. This information can be put to good use in your struggles to make it work. Our falls teach us how to do things properly.

I know you'd probably rather do it right the first time (believe me so would I) but we need to make mistakes to become great at things. It's all experience, valuable experience!

So you tried making a souffle? Somehow it exploded in your oven, leaving chocolate goo everywhere? What you do next is figure out which ingredients you accidentally switched with explosives and you know...*don't* the next time.

Same goes for fights with your partner, bad job performance, a failed diet, bad study results, friendships gone sour, other wrong choices and types of mistakes. They're all part of the learning process. You gotta fail to know how to succeed.

**I'm really happy they don't actually say that: I'd probably cry.*

11: Jump right back in!

When I've fallen out of a posture, or whenever there's another 'Man Down'* in the yoga room, and we're sitting there like a bunch of heavily breathing heaps, teachers still don't judge. They simply say: "Now take a big breath, and jump back in."

It's great that they say this. It reminds me I still have time to try again and get it right. Sometimes I get so preoccupied with the fact that I've fallen down that I forget to get up. D'oh, right? But when I get up, take that big breath and try again, I notice it is getting a little bit easier. Do this enough times and eventually, I might not even fall down!

When I don't get something right the first time, one of my most natural responses is to chuck something into a corner and go do something else.

When I first started as an intern, I turn out to be really bad at administrative paper work. This made me want to chuck it all in the nearest bin and go do something else I didn't suck at.

But eventually I realized paperwork was going to haunt me for the rest of my life, no matter what job I'd get. So I learned to take the deep breath and jump back in. If I had fucked it all up by neglecting my administrative matters for week, I'd had to get it back on track. If I had made a mess, I'd have to organize. And whereas I'm still not the best fit for a PA, I am definitely better than I was. I can now manage without too much hassle and always turn in my paperwork on time, in order. Because I always took that deep breath and jumped back in.

Apply this to life. Don't sit and wait it out! Don't wait until there is no more opportunity to try again; that's such a waste of time! You could spend so much time training, getting better, getting experience, improving, learning, if you just teach yourself to stand up *immediately after* you fall. Not tomorrow. Not after the weekend. Not at the start of a fresh new week, month or year. Do you have any idea of how much valuable time is wasted in between those mistakes and the 'fresh starts'? Einstein, you can make a fresh start right after the mistake!

Your thesis isn't going to be rejected after one harsh first review. It will be rejected when you stop answering the e-mails concerning your research, when you stop writing and turn in something terrible for the final deadline. You won't get fired because you forgot one appointment. You will get fired if you don't apologize, hide from your boss, forget more appointments and do sloppy work in general. Your diet hasn't gone to shit after one chocolate. Your diet goes to shit when you eat everything in

your cupboards, cry at night and doom yourself to a life of being unfit because you 'ruined it with a chocolate'.

Whatever goes to shit goes to shit because you told yourself it was okay to make bad choices from that point where you made a mistake. Bad move. Bad, bad move. *Never* wait it out. Take big breath, jump back in. You'll win so much time, experience and inner awesome for being so courageous and strong that after a while, you won't want it any other way.

**Parumpumpumparumpumpum. Parumpumpum.*

12: Always go with intention, not force.

In yoga, there could be a pose that's really easy for you, while that same pose is my Achilles heel. I might be able to do one posture reasonably easy, while another looks very awkward and is very uncomfortable for me. *But I cannot force my body into a posture.*

Just because it looks great on somebody else doesn't mean I should strain my spine and tense my muscles to a point where it's painful and I risk injuries. We all have different bodies, different levels of strength, endurance and flexibility. That's why teachers tells us to go with 'intention, not force.

If we go with force, we pull muscles, throw backs out, hurt ourselves. If we go with intention, we practice yoga.

For example, in a backbend this entails that if I feel my back can't bend anymore...I just shouldn't bend it any further. *I shouldn't go with force.* When I do a backbend all I need to have is *the intention that one day I will bend my back so far I will be able to see my own yoga mat.* By having that intention, you're doing all you can do and you're doing it right.

You need to do things with intention, not force. Say, I think you're really cool and I want to be your friend. Would it be a good strategy to send you dozens of e-mails every week about all the things we should go do together, to show up uninvited at your house for dinner and to stalk your Facebook Wall like we're BFFs? Um, wake up and smell the restraining order. This technique is force. I go into friendship with force.

But say I think you're really cool and want to be your friend. I might send you an e-mail telling you I think you're awesome. I'll send another one if you reply. I'll ask you from time to time how you are, and maybe eventually if you want to hang out. I might post a funny picture on your Facebook Wall. Eventually we may actually become friends! Because I go with intention instead of force,

There was no rush, no deadline, no force. I didn't cram anything down your throat. I just set the intention that I'd like to be your friend and behaved in a way that I thought was likely to mak you want to be my friend too. Not immediate, not overnight, but eventually.

You can't force anything if you want it to be real. Not in work, relationship, fitness, success or discipline. Set the intention of what you want and act upon them without force. Let the progress take its course with you instead of the other way around.

Success

13: Discipline is just a set of great habits, not a magic trick.

Believe you me, I dragged myself to yoga on more than occasion. I do not always want to go.

Because I didn't sleep very well the night before. Because I don't want to leave my warm and lovely boyfriend in our comfy bed all by himself. Because I was coming down with the flu, because I was just cranky for no particular reason. Because it rained, even. So no, I did not always go to the yoga studio with a bounce in my step and a song in my heart. I did not always go either. Sometimes I stayed home. Sometimes I still stay home.

However, when I go steadily every morning, it takes very little effort to go. Even when I'm cranky or tired or sick. If it is wired into my system and into my schedule it is very easy to go along with. When my yoga practice is inconsistent, with periods of a lot of classes at very different hours or with periods of skipping days or weeks, it is so much harder to pack my bag and actually go again.

Similarly, I drink half a litre of green juice for breakfast and have a salad for lunch almost every day. I don't think twice before chopping veggies, juicing, preparing and cleaning every morning before work. But when I skip a few days, somehow the whole process seems like a big daunting task and I'll just have a banana and a sandwich. When I have had a few days without coffee, I don't think about that I skip my lattes at work and have tea instead. But once I've had a few caffeinated days, I automatically walk down to the coffee corner at work and order a latte without even considering mint tea. And once I've had one latte, I often have another one during my next break. I make the trip without giving it any thought.

I always thought discipline was some magical sparkly inner device that always makes you do exactly what you should do, even when you don't feel like it. But now I know that my discipline is what my habits are, in every aspect.

If I make the habit out of all the things I want to do (such as going to yoga every morning, juicing, not drinking coffee) it's easy to be disciplined even *when I don't feel like it*. Once something is wired into our behavior, it takes very little effort to keep it up. You just do it on autopilot.

Becoming disciplined is not some cyborgesque transformation, it's just habits. Install your desired set of great habits, whatever they may be: drinking two litres of water, writing every day for an hour, cleaning your apartment every week, keeping a journal, no desserts, anything you'd like.

Once you've got a few days under your belt, you'd be surprised how very little effort it takes and how disciplined you truly can be.

14: Because circumstances are irrelevant the moment you decide so.

I really only truly learnt this on a Sunday morning last year. I was doing a 30 Day Challenge for charity at the time, so I really couldn't skip my class in good conscience. So I showed up. I had only had five hours of sleep, I smelled like alcohol and greasy take-out orders were coming out of my pores.

I went in with the attitude of the Hung Over. Which is just *"Please God, please, I just want to survive and not vomit."* Probably wasn't my best class (or attitude), but I lived. And I felt better afterwards.

Same with when I had the flu. I might have been close to a delirium in there, but I felt healthier and clearer after class than I had before. Same when I take classes after working from nine to five: I'm a little wiped out but still feel better afterwards. And it's not always easy to wake up at 05:30 to go to class, but it's always worth it.

Because once I'm in there, I never regret it. I forget about my lack of sleep, I forget the warm and lovely boyfriend I left in bed. My bad mood becomes just a distant memory. Once I'm there and doing it, I automatically enjoy myself. I often don't even remember the inconvenient circumstances once I go into the yoga studio.

I found that the more you ignore your circumstances, the stronger you build routines. The less attention you pay to external factors, what you want to do in life become the building blocks, the fundamental aspects. The less important you deem circumstances, the more your character will grow.

I've also seen that when you let circumstances decide what you'll do and how you'll do it, apparently external factors matter more than what you want. Which is kind of pathetic. No offense.

So what you're tired? So what the weather is foggy and misty today? So what you're sore, hung-over, have a cold or are in a bad mood? So what you're missing one book out of the seven you have to use to study? Are you going to let that stop you? Are you going to let that rule you, let these variations you can't control be more important than what YOU want? I hope not.

15: Be willing to pay the price.

For every yoga class, I use 90 minutes out of my day. Then there's the trip to and from, the additional getting ready at home and in the studio, and the winding down afterwards and showering. It adds up to between 2.5 to 3 hours a day. If I do a double class this is a total of 4 or 5 hours. I may pay money to do yoga in the studio, but I pay my yoga practice in time more than anything else. And I find time one of my most highly valued possessions, so the fact I'm dedicating so much time only means that I think it's worth it.

And it is. I've never had more energy, felt more alive and healthy and vibrant than I do when I devote time to yoga every day. But if I don't pay the price, I don't get to reap the benefits. I have got to be willing to get out of bed for it, get up from my couch for it. I have got to be willing to skip a few nights out because I want to go to yoga the next morning. It's all part of the price.

I'm not one of those people who pretends success doesn't take sacrifice. I think it does. It's spending less time with your girlfriend or your family because you have to study for your exams. It's not being able to party until six in the morning because you have killer athletic practice from 8AM to 11AM every Sunday. It's not being able to buy an expensive dress because you're saving up for your French course. It's not being able to go out of town because you need to be on call for your job. If you want something, there's a price to be paid. *And how much you are willing to pay shows how much you want it.*

Don't worry! It doesn't mean you will never get to just sit around and watch four hours of Sex&The City or that you can never go out or sleep in again. There is a time and place for everything. But you better get your priorities straight.

We can all say we want to be succesful, healthy, fit, thin, buff, healthy, financially independent, educated, smart, stylish and have a great life. In fact, I think everyone says it. Yet only a handful of people actually have the common sense to really go do something about it.

Pay the price. Once you get what you've always really wanted, you realize not only that paying the price for so long is what makes it so damn satisfactory to finally have it, and often...that it was actually a bargain.

Personal Growth

16: By doing it for you, you're doing it for everything in your life.

Sometimes I feel a little selfish for taking so much time out of my day to do yoga. I have many other obligations in terms of work, family, friends and I think my boyfriend likes to have me around too. But I should still go to yoga.

I become a very unpleasant person when I don't get enough time to take care of myself. Unpleasant doesn't even begin to cover it, really. I become a tiny bit insufferable. Because I need that time in order to function.

If you don't need that personal time, that one thing that's just yours and that makes you relaxed, all the more power to you. But I think most of us need some private time, something we do that's dedicated just to ourselves. And it makes us function better in all areas of our life.

I am more pleasant to my family when I feel great after a work-out. I do better work when I'm fit. I appreciate my boyfriend even more after I come home from 3 hours of yoga.

Everything benefits if I do something that benefits me. I bet that's the same for you. Don't feel guilty for it. The things you do for yourself are to make your entire life better.

17: Do what you can.

For a really long time, I would rather sit down than try. I didn't want to look stupid, or stiff or like I didn't know what I was doing. I was very preoccupied with how things looked to other people. Which is a waste of time, but that's a whole other point.

After I gained a little more strength and confidence, I started to try a little more. I started to do what I can. Holding on. Doing what I could do instead of getting frustrated I couldn't do what I wanted to be able to do. Not worrying so much about how things looked, but focusing on what I was doing. If I had a hard time, I did the best I could. Knowing I'd learn more from that than I would from sitting on my ass was enough.

This is hardly impressive (it's especially sad if you think about how long it took me to figure this out) but here's the thing: *if you don't do something, you're not going to get any better at it.*

How will you ever improve if you sit down the moment you're faced with

something you're not good at (yet)? Do you make your boyfriend cook because herbs baffle you? Are you worried about not being able to write your Master Thesis because you can't get through the Introduction? Do you give up on the idea of ever running a marathon because you can 'only' run 10 KM right now? Cut it out right now.

Don't give up, just do what you can. So what you can't make a perfect quiche just yet? Make an omelette! I don't care if you have to use Google for it, just try. You can get to the more complicated dishes later in life.

So you don't pop out 30 000 brilliant words for your Master Thesis? Who the hell has ever done that anyway?! Just write 200 extra words for your introduction and keep going.

Of course you can't run a marathon right now. But that doesn't mean you won't be able to do later! Run that 12KM first. Run that 12KM again. And again. And again, until you move on to 14. Repeat. Add two kilometres. Repeat.

Doing what you can is always better than doing nothing because you're not yet as awesome as you want to. By doing what you can, you eventually become exactly as awesome as you'd like to be.

18: Get ready to be uncomfortable.

I know something is happening in terms of progress when I'm doing things that make me very uncomfortable. Change, especially big change makes people uncomfortable.

Right now, I'm going through a phase where I find it very hard to get myself into the yoga studio. Because I want to learn more about the postures, train my body to a new level of fitness, become more focused. I want all of that, but that huge self-assigned task is freaking me out too, which is why I'm totally sabotaging myself by making going to yoga seem like the fucking Oddysey. I could dive into a whole vat of personal issues with insecurity and not feeling good enough that lie below the surface of that, but let's not.

Let's just say that if you want to do something new, or more difficult, or bigger, or more bad ass, you're bound to run into some uncomfortable feelings.

Our comfort zones are called this for a reason: they're nice and cushy and we feel nice and safe there. But there is such an array of possibilities outside of our comfort zone that if we really want to grow, we have to leave it. And sure, that is hard sometimes! You can feel anxious and uncomfortable and worried and jittery.

Because you're not sure if this wonderful new man in your life is going to like your friends; and the other way around! Or you don't understand any of the technical jibber jabber your professor is putting on the board. Or you feel super awkward in your first three salsa classes. Or your new boss explained everything way too fast and now you're in front of a computer and you don't know what to do.

There's really only one thing you can do about it: *Rambo your way through*. Just ride it out. Do what you want to do. Don't let the awkwardness, the nerves or the fear get to you. After a while the uncomfortable feeling fades. You start to think 'hey, I think that I did alright here!' at times. Eventually you can enjoy what you're going through for what it is without worrying, being nervous or afraid. The discomfort is temporary.

Other people

19: You can learn from everyone.

In both yoga class and life you can find an endless variety of teachers, examples and anti-examples. I learnt to spend less time being intimidated, jealous or annoyed and spend more time figuring out what I could learn from the person in front of me.

My yoga teachers are all great in their own way. I learn different things from different teachers: sometimes one of them just gives a tip that changes the way I do a posture completely. Other times it's just the way one of them puts it, the use of another word or changing the sentence that just makes it 'click' and I really get it then. Their different approaches often suit my mood. If they don't, I suck it up and accept it for what it is, work through it.

There are all these yoga students too, with wonderful, aspiring qualities. Whether it's their exceptional focus, how they keep smiling while they practice (I get a case of the Bitch Face when I'm focused), their dedication or simply their flexibility or strength: I love them as my examples. I learn from them and take with me what I can into my own practice.

And of course, there are students I don't want to be. Those that fidget, make a fuss, argue with the teacher or disturb other students. I can get annoyed, but what's the point in that? Better to be inspired by them too: I know I don't want to be like that.

Same in life! If you listen or look, you can learn from so many people. From direct contact, but also through books, characters in movies, bloggers online. The same applies to examples and anti-examples. So you do want to be like you're disciplined co-worker, but not like those negative nancy administrators? You do want to be kind like your mother, but not like the friend who's always late? Well, great!

By looking around you and learning from the people in your life, you carve out yourself and the way you want to live your life. Good thing to do.

20: Nobody has to be perfect

I remember my surprise when one of my teachers fell out of a posture in front of me for the first time. See, when the teachers and experienced yogis train with us they're just so gorgeous and focused all the time, that I made them perfect in my head. So when one of them fell over, I was a little shocked at first. Another part of me wanted to rush over and be like: "Oh my God, you fall on your butt sometimes too?! Let's be besties!"

But even those great yogis fall out of a posture from time to time. Sometimes they lose focus too. They have bad and better days. And sure, I'd love to trade most of my good days to have my bad days look like theirs, but it reminds me that nobody needs to be perfect. You can be great and making a mistake every once in a while does not make you any less great.

Making mistakes is okay. Always. Even when you're brilliant, wonderful and amazing. You still never have to be perfect. Do you have any idea how liberating this is? That you are always allowed to fail, fall, or screw up?

It's fine if you forget a deadline for a paper, if you accidentally congratulate a co-worker on her birthday two weeks early (or late) or if you accidentally ruin your boyfriend's favorite shirt. By all means, make it a habit to do things as excellent as you can, but remember it's not the end of the world if you do something wrong.

Mind you, this goes for you as well as the people around you. If you don't have to be perfect, neither does your boyfriend have to be, or your parents, or anyone around you. Allow each other the imperfections. Tolerance is where it's at.

21: People who love you won't make you give up something you love*

Nobody I know in real life really understood my love for yoga. My parents made jokes about meditation and floating up, my brother mocked me for being 'Zen with a side of curse words'. My boyfriend, bless his heart, was very sceptical about yoga at first. He didn't believe it could be good for me, spending 90 minutes a day soaked in sweat, stretching up and down and back up again. He worried he'd never get to see me anymore.

But then he saw how good it was for me. Not just butt-wise (he never complained pre-yoga either) but in terms of energy, self-esteem, mood and focus. And he loves that I found something that I love so much. So do my parents. They've never seen me in better shape and happier. They trust my judgment and are happy I've found something that makes me so happy.

And so should anyone in your life that loves you feel about the things you do that make you happy. Even if your husband does not understand why you go to the gym four times a week, he should be happy for you that you've found a sport you like. Your parents shouldn't fuss when you love to study law. Your friends shouldn't belittle your raw food diet, your choice of partner, your habits. As long as you're doing things that you stand behind, so should the people who love you.

The people you love will support you. They should.

If they don't, you do three things. First, you can explain more or better why you do the things you do. Second, you can give them time so they can see for themselves why you do what you do. And finally, in severe cases where nothing seems to help, you ignore them and still keep doing what's good for you. No reason to let anything stop you, you know.

**Drugs, murdering and hanging out with psychopathic boyfriends or girlfriends excluded.*

Last Lessons

22: Be Grateful.

Say 'thank you'. Both to the person who brings you your coffee as yourself for taking a yoga class as to everything in your life that you love.

If you find things to be grateful for, be it your partner, the comfortable sweater or the sun outside, this has a few effects. One, you notice the awesome things in your life which makes you happy. Two, this creates a positive attitude. Three, you will probably say nice things because you're happy: this makes people like you. Easy as that.

Be grateful for everything you're blessed with and make sure to express this.

23: Don't Compare.

Here's the thing: when you're watching and judging what someone else is doing, you're not paying attention to what you're doing. Not really. Not fully. Not enough.

Learn to tune out the Comparison Channel. It's the only way. You won't get better at anything when you're too busy comparing yourself to others. Knock it off. Focus on you.

24: Always trust yourself. Do what makes you happy.

I want to write, teach, drink green juice, and do lots of yoga. If I do this, I'm happy. Maybe you want to go mountainbiking, travel to all countries, or work in a prison, learn Klingon for all I care. You're not wrong. If you really want to do that, if it's going to make you feel good: *go out there and do it.*

There can be a lot of people in your life who may give you advice or instructions, even tell you what you should do. Hopefully they have your best interest in mind. That doesn't mean they're right. They might make a point every now and again but there is only one person can truly tell what's best for you. That's you.

There is nobody out there who has better judgment on how to live your life than you do. *You* know what is best for you. You have the right to decide how you want to spend your time, live your life and do yourself justice. *Namaste.*