

## ***Feeding The Yoga Monster??!***

By James Figueria

ARRRH! “Eat Yoga”! “Sleep Yoga”! “Speak Yoga”!

Think, think, think!

When can I do a back bends? How do I hop through like the guy on the video?

How’s my breath now? Is it deep enough?

Is this the right way to do Trikonasana? (I heard someone say something else).

Meat? No meat?

My Dosha’s are all off! I’m too Kapha or is it Pitta?

Am I using my Bandas?

Stop for a second.

Does this all sound frighteningly familiar?

I have been a yoga teacher for almost a decade and increasingly I have come to believe that with the popularization of yoga, partly the result of teachers being eager to spread the wonders of our yoga experience, we have been slowly and unwittingly creating yoga monsters.

Let me start with some of my background.

I am an authorized Ashtanga teacher and before you get ready to knock me off my high horse I must add that yes, like most teachers I did teach before I was authorised and yes I even taught in a gym and yes, I’ve done my share of workshops around the world as well.

And I enjoy a beer and pizza and feel surges of violence when people around me start diagnosing each others doshas and recommending what to eat and not to while I’m having my beer and pizza. So if it seems I’m on a some high horse I am sure it’s a pretty small horse.

I was a fitness trainer and a gymnastics coach for 20 years before I started on my yoga journey. (I trained people for competitions and did rehab for injured gymnasts)

During that time, I thought I had met some of the most obsessive people ever.

They ate only boiled food, measured their body fat everyday, worked out like crazy and thought about their bodies 24/7. Which all by the way had nothing to do with being fit.

But they where just amateurs compared with some of the yoga folks I have met over the last decade.

If yoga is to make us more aware of our behaviour and our habits and enable us to bring about a inner stillness and calm in our lives, how did we become so obsessed about physical practice and why does it seem to be only getting bigger.

Who is responsible?

Is it the people traveling the world and doing workshops and teacher training for people they hardly know? Is it the fault of the consumer yoga and yoga “lifestyle” being fed to the us in the slick yoga magazines and on the Internet? (50 Clever Ways To Improve Your Backbends -- tweak that a bit

and it could be an article from Good Housekeeping or Cosmopolitan) Is it our teaching? Or is it just a natural consequence of this world-wide explosion of interest in yoga?

Once, a few years ago, my teacher, Sri K Pattabhi Jois, was asked about yoga becoming so popular in the West.

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First, he said he was not happy about it, but then he said at the least now more people are saying & thinking the word yoga than ever before so it's not so bad. (Just to say the word yoga can help begin to bring good changes in people).

So what am I trying to say. What is my point you ask? Well it's very simple.

Let's spread the word but stop feeding the monsters!

Now I say this because I have had these sweet little monsters come into my classes and think think, think, about every thing else but doing their practice. That's why the dialogue at the start of this article is so familiar.

If yoga is state of mind, and to achieve that state of mind we must practice non-attachment to the fruits of our efforts, which includes non-attachment to the idea of reaching a perfect state in the practice of yoga asana, why are we ( by we I mean the teachers) in the yoga world are sometimes more concerned with promoting the perfect yoga pose and therefore giving students more to think about in their asanas then inspiring them to practice as it ?

I hope over the next few months share some things I have noticed and ideas on how we can continue to promote yoga without getting too far away from the main point of teaching as I see it --which is pass along correct knowledge of yoga, to encourage and inspire people to want to deepen their own self awareness, and ask deeper questions of themselves more than "should I jump through straight legs or crossed legs".

Now before you send me hate mail, I must add that I write this as a direct response to my own students whom I have somehow turned into little yoga monsters.

It has made me re-think what I say as a teacher in my classes and workshops.

As my teacher says "before thinking one way now thinking different".

In the end we are all really just students and I don't think that anyone can really teach yoga but rather give the tools to help and support us with our own experience. It is the practice itself that is the real teacher.

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### ***About James Figueria - Director & Principle Teacher of The Yoga Shala, Singapore.***

*James is an authorized teacher from Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (AYRI) Mysore, India. He has over 25 years of teaching experience behind him. A former US National Gymnastics Coach, his background in gymnastic and fitness training gives him a very good understanding of physical movement, and how it relates to each individual. Originally from Honolulu Hawaii, James has taught and held work shops in Malaysia, USA, and Africa, as well as Singapore. [www.theyogashala.com.sg](http://www.theyogashala.com.sg)*

