

JAPAN'S QUALITY ENGLISH MAGAZINE THE WEEKENDER

Q & A

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Job title: Yoga teacher and writer

Nationality: American

Time in Japan: one and a half years this time, previously four years in early 1990s.

WEEKENDER: Describe what exactly is yoga?

LOWITZ: Yoga literally means "divine union", and is derived from the Sanskrit verb *yuj*, which means "yoke," or "unite." Yoga is an ancient discipline that seeks union with the divine. It is the science of spiritual, mental, and physical self-transformation. It balances the body's energy centers, awakening our innate potential, releasing physical, mental, energetic and psychological blocks that limit potential, leading to a sense of calm, balance and joy. There are over 840,000 yoga postures, or *asanas*. They represent the shapes of animals such as monkeys, dogs, fish, cobras, turtles and nature, such as mountains, trees, the moon and the sun. These days, most people practice about 50 postures. A good yoga class should consist of yoga breathing (*pranayama*), yoga postures (*asana*), and meditation (*dhyana*).

What are the physical and psychological benefits of doing yoga?

Physically, it strengthens the muscles, increases flexibility, releases stress and fatigue, calms the nervous system, massages the internal organs and leads to greater vitality and youthfulness. That's why many yoga practitioners live well into their 90s! Yoga promotes inner stability and equanimity and allows us to quiet our minds. This



makes it possible to observe our limiting mental and physical habits and finally, to become free of them. It is a deeply rejuvenating, inspiring and calming practice.

What kind of students do you teach?

We have students from all over the world including Asia, Europe, America, Canada, Africa, the Middle East, Pacific Rim, New Zealand, Australia.

Basically everywhere from Sudan to Siberia, young and old, flexible and, in one student's words, "stiff as a board." The gender balance is 65 percent women, 35 percent men.

What advice would you give to a beginner wanting to take up yoga?

Remember when we were children and did all sorts of wonderful movements with our bodies? Why did we stop playing in that way? Yoga helps us rekindle that sense of wonder and awe.

Just come and explore your body and breathing. Don't worry if you are stiff or if you can't bend your body into fancy positions because yoga isn't about that. It's about moving into your deepest self and exploring your potential. And if you practice yoga, you *will* become more supple. Guaranteed! All yoga asks is that you focus on breathing and be aware of the sensations in your body. To breathe is to live. To focus on the breath is to fully embrace life in the present moment.

www.lezalowitz.com/sunandmoonyoga.html