

Aum in the home

It's easy to set up your own yoga practice **BY ELISSA JANE MASTEL**

AUM — THE ANCIENT WORD WHICH, ACCORDING TO HINDU TRADITION IS THE FIRST VIBRATION OF THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE — SOUNDS SO AWE-SOME WHEN RESONATED THROUGH THE ROOM AT THE BEGINNING AND ENDING OF YOGA CLASS. I WONDER IF I COULD DO THIS AT HOME?

I asked Shawn Harrison of Mudita Yoga Center in Uptown Kingston if she had some advice and insight as to how I can get my home-based yoga practice going again. I was a regular student at her studio, and she had inspired me to work on my practice at home with a printout of asanas she chose for me. Her encouragement to practice on my own changed the way I view yoga; Shawn taught me that the best way to experience yoga as a practice is to do it at home, which I did, in my bedroom, for several years. Then life got busy this past summer, time and I let go of the routine I had carved out for myself. Dare I say, I'm totally out of yoga shape!

Sipping on fresh mint tea, Shawn and I explored and chatted about some solutions and ideas about creating a home-based practice. Some of the great benefits of a home-based practice include consistency, opportunity to develop awareness and to apply mindfulness by doing what feels right at your own pace. "Practicing yoga at home in your own space and your own time creates opportunity to be mindful of what your body is asking for that day. By carving out time to practice, dedicating yourself to your practice you become more

available to yourself," she reminded me.

What do you need for a home practice? "Nothing," said Shawn. She advises that you can practice on any surface that creates comfort: "I just use a blanket from the couch and the floor." Apparently yoga mats, etc., are Western phenomena — true OG yogis practice with what is. What is important is that you practice in the same space each time.

In my room, I have a cleared just enough floor space to practice all my asanas comfortably. I've tried practicing in other parts of my little house, but this is the space where I've consistently created a vibration. "The spirit of practice is creative and free," Shawn reminded me. Enjoying the peace and stillness of your space is essential to setting the tone for your home practice space.

I have a mat. I also have various cushions, meditation cushions, candles, incense and other things that help me relax into my home practice space. Sometimes I take the time to set the tone, sometimes the stillness of the moment, the quiet of the early morning or late evening when I practice is enough to tune into to find that mindset. Sometimes I really like music, I put on Last.fm's Deva Premal or Gabrielle Roth channels and the tunes are presented for me. What I most identify with in Shawn's advice is the idea of practicing in the same space. I too like creating consistency and energy in this way.

How to get started

What if I'm a beginner? Can I create a practice at home? Shawn gave me a resounding yes. She does advise starting with a regular weekly class schedule. Mudita Yoga Center offers gentle basics classes several times a week. There are also beginner classes at other area studios like Shakti Yoga Center at Mac Fitness in




Shawn Harrison of Mudita Yoga Center meditates as a friend helps.

Kingston and on Zena Road. By starting your practice in this way, you can learn some basic postures which you can then continue to work on in the privacy of your home. If you want to create a more personalized set of postures for practice, both Shawn and Lalita of Shakti Yoga offer private sessions. This is a fantastic way to get your own personalized regiment of postures to work on as you are learning the basics. I advise staying away from videos, especially when you are new. Yoga is all about alignment, and you don't want to get in the habit of creating bad habits by practicing while turning and watching a screen or making incorrect choices with your body, which could be a difficult habit to break.

In the end, Shawn pointed out that "the concept of 'practice' can be looked at as a way of getting good at something, in the same way practicing the piano gives us the ability to play beautifully [or] practicing a sport gives us skill and agility, we practice yoga asana and meditation to become good at life. Practicing yoga gives us the ability/the tools to live life beautifully and skillfully."

Mudita Yoga Center, on 243 Fair St. in Uptown Kingston, is offering a "Building a Home Practice" workshop on Dec. 10 from noon-2 p.m. For more info, visit muditayogacenter.com.



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