

## **Inquiry of Yoga** July 2011

We slow down, we tune inwardly and we check in with our back and shoulders to see what is going on.

— Vandita Kate Marchesiello



*Photos courtesy of Sports Club/LA-Boston*

## **By Joanne M. Choi** June 2011

The former Jesuit chapel is filled with natural sunlight and music. People partnered into small groups are moving and dancing around the carpeted room to the upbeat sounds of Coldplay's "Viva la Vida" in this unexpectedly fun and heart pumping YogaDance class.



Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Stockbridge, Mass.

Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health sits on 300 acres in the bucolic Berkshires of Western Massachusetts. Formerly the Novitiate of St. Stanislaus, the Center is now a community of 399 employees, 60 volunteers and scores of guests, many of

whom are repeat visitors.

Vandita Kate Marchesiello joined Kripalu in 2000 and has more than 30 years experience as a yoga instructor under her belt. She is now the director of Kripalu Professional Associations.

“The essence of Kripalu yoga is really a lifestyle,” Vandita says in a rapid-fire of thoughts. “... how to cultivate consciousness throughout your day ... to eat mindfully ... to discover yoga that is right for your body from the inside out ... not forcing your body into a position not appropriate for your level or flexibility.

Vandita then explained an oft-repeated phrase in a Kripalu class: “being in the inquiry of Yoga.” Says Vandita: “When we are in the ‘inquiry of yoga,’ that means we slow down, we tune inwardly and we check in with our back and shoulders to see what it going on.”

Nodding at her words, she continues, “When the instructor offers suggestions for poses, you ultimately are your best teacher, you have the wisdom of your own body, not to force but to use your breath to take you deeper into the yoga stretch itself, so being in the inquiry of yoga.”

In Vandita’s opinion, “In other styles ... there isn’t any teaching around the consciousness of listening to your body. [Practitioners] may end up pulling a hamstring or working beyond their level.”



The benefits of yoga are now being touted for those suffering from chronic debilitating diseases.

The center recently held its first “Skillful Living with Diabetes” program. It aims to help small groups of diabetics integrate yoga, healthy eating and other lifestyles choices into their lives.

Dr. William C. Hsu of the Asian American Diabetes Initiative (AADI) at the Joslin Diabetes Center says, “In general, exercise is encouraged for overall health in individuals with diabetes ... [and] yoga is a form of exercise that many people use to reduce stress.”

Regularly scheduled classes are a way to keep yoga in one’s routine. The Sports Club/LA-Boston Mind Body Studios opened in 2006 and has an extensive and diverse class schedule.

If you are a member of a local gym, check to see if they offer any yoga classes. For those who don't have a gym membership, some affordable options are available at Back Bay Yoga. Seven days a week, they offer \$5 community classes that are 90 minutes long.

Recognizing that the majority of people neither can spend months in an ashram in India like Elizabeth Gilbert of "Eat, Pray, Love" fame nor be at a place like Kripalu for days on end, it is about realistic goals that can be met that are in line with a person's schedule and budget.

Jess Lopez, yoga instructor at the Sports Club/LA-Boston, said it is very important to recognize that yoga can be incorporated in your day to day life and does not require that you always have to dedicate a full hour or 90 minutes. There are several quick and easy yoga sequences that can be done in front of your computer or in an empty conference room.

Once the decision is made to practice yoga, there will be some tweaking to find the style that suits your body and lifestyle.

Ask yourself: Can you give your body 5-10 minutes a day to practice a yoga pose? "The Seated Spinal Twist," the Standing Forward Bend," "Lunge," "Thread the Needle" and the "Standing Side Bend" — all are a great ways to start when time doesn't allow for more than that.

It might be that the most difficult part about yoga is just starting. Tal Ben-Shahar discusses rituals in his book "Happier." "Initiating a ritual is often difficult, but maintaining it is relatively easy," he writes. "The most creative individuals — whether artists, businesspeople, or parents — have rituals that they follow. Paradoxically, the routine frees them up to be creative and spontaneous."