

The Dog Days of Summer

Written by Shelley Lowther
Wednesday, 18 July 2012 07:55



(aka “Hey, You’re Sweating All Over My Saucha”)

I get the question all the time – do you really practice yoga in a heated room?

The answer is unwaveringly yes, which leads, inevitably, to the question (insert really inquisitive and mildly skeptical voice here), “WHY?”

In Baptiste Yoga classes, we heat the room for a number of reasons. The obvious reason is, of course, that a warm room helps your muscles to lengthen and release, allowing for a deeper stretch and a full asana experience. In a world where instant gratification takes too long, the heated practice has the advantage of moving a practitioner along at a quicker pace. It is not a shortcut, mind you, but a catalyst.

Yet, despite the enhancement and deeper stretch, the main reason we heat the room may not be as obvious. In the yoga sutras, we learn that part of our **ashtanga**, or eight-limbed path, is

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saucha

. Saucha is the first of the

niyamas

, or personal disciplines. Saucha is purity or cleanliness of the body, the mind and the spirit, but not just on the surface. In addition to keeping our physical bodies clean, we seek internal cleanliness, in the forms of avoiding metaphysical impurities such as ego and anger, but also ridding ourselves of the impurities of the physical body.

Our skin is the largest elimination organ in our body. When we sweat, we release toxins from the body, purifying and cleansing us from the inside out. To use a very popular word of this age, it's a **detox**. The heated practice helps us to cleanse our minds of toxic thinking by embodying the physicality of the asana practice, but also physically helps us rid the body of toxins from our diet and lifestyle choices. It's like a double-edged karmic sword of detoxification.

Let's face it – even if Miss Manners prefers glistening, sweating is good for you. It feels good to rid yourself of toxins and to know that you are doing something great for your body. Other forms of detox are good too: juice, fruit feast, go raw. Treat your body well with your diet and exercise regimen and you will see vast improvements in many areas of your life. But sweat once a day – all over your saucha or your yogi-toes – and you will feel like a new human being.

Hot yoga classes may seem intimidating. People offer up all manner of excuses, from “I just can't take the heat”, to “I'm menopausal.” The truth is, despite many fears to the contrary, the heat won't kill you. If you do feel dizzy or even nauseated in your first class, this is caused by toxins fleeing your body. After another class or two, this dissipates and you start to crave the heat (really). Take a Baptiste, JIvamukti or Bikram class and I promise – you will go home feeling great.

If you live in the South, where the dog days of summer keep all the dogs inside in the air conditioning, there is yet another positive benefit to a regular heated yoga practice: you don't notice the heat as much. You may not believe me, but I challenge you to practice any form of hot yoga for a few weeks. My promise to you is that the sultry South Carolina weather will stop feeling so much like a wet blanket and more like a cosmic breeze. You'll glisten your way to glowing – from the inside out.

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