

Judith Hanson Lasater, Compassion and Drunken Electrons

By Andrea Marcum



Judith Hanson Lasater, one of yoga's pioneering women, took her first yoga class at the local YMCA in 1971 and fell in love. Ten months later, her teacher moved away and she found herself at age 24, with no formal training, teaching 20 yoga classes a week. Since then she studied with Swami Vishnudevananda and B.K.S. Iyengar, became a certified physical therapist, earned a PhD in East-West Psychology, and raised a family. In 1975, she was one of the founding editors for an upstart yoga newsletter called Yoga Journal. If that's not enough to make you feel under-accomplished, she's also written eight books, including the best selling "Living Your Yoga: Finding the Spiritual in Everyday Life."

I've lost count of how many copies of Lasater's "Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga For Stressful Times" I've gifted people. It's the restorative yoga bible, and has traveled around the world with me as I've led retreats. But just because she wrote the bible doesn't mean Judith is OK with the label "restorative"—in fact, you best not try to label her at all. Yoga and pregnancy, anatomy and kinesiology as well as using the yogic principle of satya (truth) as part of a path towards understanding that "What We Say Matters: Practicing Nonviolent Communication" are just a few of the topics covered in her other books.

Judith once said she felt we might be "using distraction to sell introspection." I asked her if she thought that could be true today. "I think it's possible for all of us to use our yoga to distract us from our yoga. Because we get so caught up in the form that we forget the soul."

"Why are we doing all these handstands, backbends and arm balances?" Judith said. "I don't know why we're doing them unless our lives are shaped and changed. What you want to get as a teacher is not an email or a Facebook post that says, 'I learned so much about headstands in your class'. What you want to get is 'I learned so much about myself and my life in your class'."

"I believe that yoga should lead us to a place where kindness and compassion are instantaneous. Compassion is fierce and strong, and it holds people accountable. But it doesn't do it with anger or judgment. For example, to hold John Friend, who is a friend of

mine, accountable for his actions is to love him fiercely. Compassion is the litmus test.”
“I don’t think we find compassion. I think we become the space that compassion wants to live in. You can’t make yourself be compassionate, you can only keep stepping back and becoming a larger container in which compassion wants to live. The practice should open us up, and crack open our hearts again and again.”

A larger container indeed...not to be limited or labeled, Judith began reading me the poetry she’s been writing. I think this line from one of them says it all:

Joy is big.

Joy lives in your own drunken electrons, billions of them, spinning and dancing without end in their own intimate Universe, longing for You.

Do not look for joy anywhere else.

It is living in you, and gives meaning to all Existence.

“Living your yoga is not just doing it, but being it,” Judith said as we signed off.

“Keep your drunken electrons dancing! She exclaimed.

That I will—Thank you Judith, for your incredible insight.

For more of Judith’s poetry visit [Judith’s website](#). For a podcast of our conversation visit www.ustudioyoga.com

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