

This is **My** New **Life**

...and I love living it!

by Yvette Molan

Beginning yoga is like standing on the shore of a perfectly still lake... As you step in the reflection is disturbed, but as you grow accustomed to the lake and it to you the perfect reflection returns and with it also the ability to see what lies beneath.

I'll admit I was scared when it all started. I had no idea, not even an inkling, that my life was going to be turned upside down in a matter of months. In the beginning, I had no conscious awareness that something completely life-altering was taking place, although I could feel it. I could feel that 'something' was happening.

I'd started yoga classes about a year earlier and had really taken to it after the first class I attended. Those first 12 months were filled with getting to know my body, with all its tightness and resistance to movement. I loved how, in those early days, I'd find myself bringing yoga into my daily life, by starting to bring *Tadasana* into my legs at work, or examining my alignment (or lack of it) when I

was lounging around at home.

The physical changes were obvious and inspiring to someone as new to yoga as I was, but now I was starting to feel a change coming from a totally different angle and affecting me in a totally different way. I'd read some articles linking yoga and consciousness and they were intriguing, but the truth of these I didn't feel until I started to experience it through every fibre of my being. I hadn't realised that the change yoga had initiated in my body would be the catalyst for change in my mind. Day by day I'd find I was thinking about things a little differently, I was seeing things as if I'd never truly opened my eyes and I was noticing things I'd been looking at all my life. I'd been glossing over so much of my world because I thought I'd seen it all before, but now a smile from a stranger passing on the street or the stillness of a fog-shrouded morning were enough to lift my whole day. The whole world was new again and I was revelling in the feeling of being alive.

At the same time, though, I was going through the greatest inner turmoil I'd ever experienced. I'd become a stranger to myself and I thought for a while that perhaps I was going crazy. I realised, however, that I wasn't losing my mind; I was finding myself within it. Until this point my life had been perpetually stable (with some minor exceptions) but all of a sudden, after being taught and learning a degree of self-awareness, my mind was cavorting through a series of life-altering back flips.

I remember looking in the mirror one day, squinting my eyes critically at myself and

asking just who the hell I was. I'd grown up to think that of all the people in the world I knew, I knew myself best. I was my own island and I was unshakable in my beliefs. Then I started yoga and before I knew what was happening, all my faults were put under a spotlight and they shone like beacons through my clouded perceptions. Every prejudice and bias, a lifetime of conditioning and forming of habits and now I could see how they skewed my perception of reality so I no longer knew what was real and what I'd distorted to fit into my vision of life. Every day was filled with confusion as I realised most of the way I saw the world was false. How could I have been so blind to what was now so glaringly obvious?

These thoughts were turning endless circles in my mind. I was seeing how I truly was for the first time and a lot of what I saw I didn't particularly like. I was wondering when I'd become so cynical and hard, when I'd stopped giving people the chances they deserved, when my focus had shifted to highlight what was negative in my life instead of what was positive and when I'd given up on humanity and the world we lived in. Never had I felt so confronted and alone. Never would I have imagined that I could have made myself feel this way. I was wondering how I'd managed to be a functioning human being for so long when my life was built around contradictions. However, there was something that kept me going at this time and ironically it was what was at the heart of the eye-opening, mind-bending, life-changing metamorphosis I was going through, it was yoga.

Yoga had become a sanctuary for me. Every day my lounge room became my oasis. There I'd enter my practice and allow myself to be absorbed by it. It was the one place I could feel truth when I doubted everything so strongly. The old foundations of my life were crumbling away but learning yoga was building new, strong and true foundations for me to live by. More and more it seemed as though my practice was allowing me to piece myself together with a depth of understanding I'd never experienced before. So while I was coming to terms with the fact that I'd never really known myself, I could rely on the knowledge of my awareness coming into the base of my big toe. I knew the truth of my outer calf coming onto the bone. These are the things that saved me. These and one

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other tiny, totally integral lesson that was given to me when I was the closest I've ever been to a breaking point. It was something that never would have occurred to me on my own and I was as stunned by its simplicity as I was moved by its impact. The wonderful, beautiful lesson of compassion.

This lesson came to me via an email and I recall vividly the profound effect it had as I sat, staring at the screen, reading over and over again the words that allowed me to finally stop the constant criticism and self-abuse I'd been subjecting myself to. The words that allowed me to start to accept myself just as I was, with all my imperfections: "Compassion. Most importantly for ourselves. Then it can radiate out." At long last I could breathe again, finally the weight of my thoughts stopped crushing me. For months I'd been struggling to come to terms with (while denying) who and how I was, all the time trying to hang on to the "I" I'd grown to be, but now I could allow myself to believe that everything was going to be okay, that this was something I was going to get through. What had happened, though, was so important to my development and learning. I had to come face to face with this, otherwise my foundation for yoga and my life beyond this point would have been flawed. It was frightening to see myself for the first time, but coming to terms with this first piece of truth and finding where the ability lay to accept myself as I was gave me the starting point I needed to work from.

I felt like I was starting to understand life a little; lots of little lessons were falling into place and now I could see how they affected every

aspect of my existence. My practice, which had been very muscular and hard, was starting to soften and I was starting to come in touch with the flow of energy in my body. I came to see how I based my practice around my need to quantify, how I was constantly measuring myself against previous efforts and desired goals. Luckily, with that, I realised that the importance was actually in not quantifying. I could feel physically how this sort of goal orientation brought hardness into my body and how my thoughts reflected that hardness. It was stopping me from moving forward to the most important aspect of my practice, which was just now beginning in my mind. I went from questioning quantities of strength to asking what point I was coming from, where my mind was in the decision to act and what my motives were upon entering an *asana*.

These became questions I would ask in life outside my practice and the relevance and implications of them wasn't lost for a moment as I started to look even more closely at my dealings with people. I realised (to my surprise and dismay) how questionable my motives were at times. I started to see how I'd attempt to manipulate situations to work in my favour, with the inflections I'd put on words, expressions I'd dramatise and moods I'd accentuate to get a desired response. All these things were coming from a part of my mind that was looking only to benefit itself. Once I learnt to follow these thought patterns back to their source in my ego they started to unravel themselves, as if their power to coerce me to a particular mode of action evaporated once I came to see them for what they were. The honesty I was searching for in my *asana*

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Finally I was realising what it meant to be open, physically and mentally. My body was responding to the opportunities I was giving it to accept new movements as I was no longer forcing it to conform to my ideals. I was starting to allow things to happen in their own time instead of pushing myself to the physical limits I held to so strongly in my mind. I was amazed at how much give there was in my body using this approach. All through my life I'd achieved things using the strength of my body and my mind and if that didn't get the desired result initially I'd try again, using even greater force. Now I had to totally reverse that thinking because applying force implied encountering resistance and the implication was enough to bring the expected resistance into my mind and body.

Never had I felt my naivety and ignorance so keenly as when I realised just how little I knew. The law had considered me an adult for nine years, but here I was feeling like a child again. Before yoga I'd been cocky and brash, to cover up the doubts I had about myself, but now I no longer had that armour. So, in order to re-establish myself in truth, I found my mind was overflowing with questions and the desire for answers. I wanted to know if consciousness was an affliction and if failing to check your perception closed you to what was real and forced you to conform to an ideal. I wanted to know if you discriminated the truth were you then able to check if your discrimination was true and was it possible to be aware at the time that consciousness was clouded. When I was asking these questions I was yearning for the answers to these and many others until it came to me that sometimes it was the asking that was important and not the answers. Some of the questions have now been

answered and others haven't. I'm content, however, with the knowledge that the answers will come to me when I'm ready to learn them. I'm no longer ashamed of my lack of knowledge because now it means that I have so much to gain.

I found I loved the aspect of *asana* that allowed me to ask the same questions over and over again. It was bringing me in touch with how much my body could change from moment to moment, provided I could stop myself from succumbing to the lure of my ever-present comfort zones and be alert to my tendency to skew reality to suit myself. We are reminded in class to be alert to complacency and comfort zones but it turns out that these few words entail a lifetime's work. My mind will so easily gloss over a nearly engaged pelvic floor or a partially lifted inner arch, not that I want to be that way but because I am that way. It's another aspect to the challenge of finding the truth, that instead of being receptive to the information coming to our mind from our body we can create information to suit our needs.

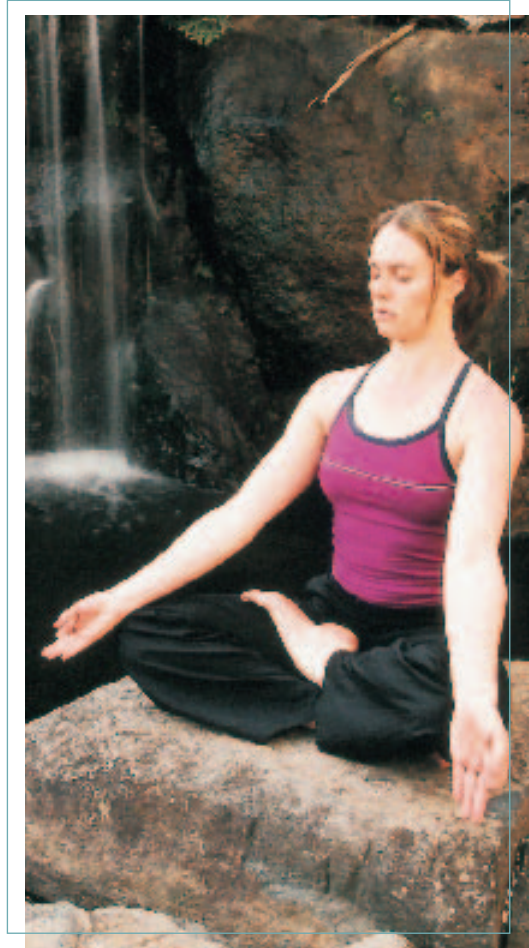
During this time it dawned on me that I was part of a world full of possibilities. In essence I'd started a new life by shedding an old one. Previous to this I'd unconsciously allowed the world I existed in to shrink, so that all that seemed to matter was work, a new mortgage and the little bit of fun I'd afford myself on weekends. Right now, I still have the same job and the same mortgage and weekends are still the only time I can "afford" to have fun, but these hard facts of life in our society pale when compared to what I see as the new richness in my life, which includes realising and appreciating the diversity of humanity and my part within it. I've found the ability to see the good in people first and have understanding and compassion for them in their lives, instead of always seeing things only from my point of view. I've realised that we have a choice in how we see the world and while it's easy to get caught up in the apparently never ending stream of bad news from our televisions, or the frustrated, angry, self-absorbed people that seem to be out to get us every time we walk into a supermarket or get behind the wheel of our car, it's the ability to find the good in the bad, the hope in the seemingly hopeless, that makes me realise that underneath it all everyone has so much to offer. Everyone has such great potential to live the lives they're in.

These things are central in my life now, along with the opportunities that arise to ignite in people an interest in yoga when they ask me how I stay so calm and relaxed when everyone around me is so stressed, or why it is that I'm always smiling and happy. This is my new life and I love living it.

I see the path that lies ahead as endless and the task I've undertaken remains beyond my ability to comprehend, but there has never been a time when I've thought of stopping. I knew by this stage that yoga would remain central in my life. I wanted nothing more than to uphold the integrity of this ancient philosophy and by that integrity I would stand firm and immovable. It became sanctified in its irreligiousness. The enormity of the subject left me feeling bewildered on a number of occasions until I learned to stay focused on where I was instead of what lay at the limits of my perception. I know that, for the course of this life, I'll be endlessly seeking without a chance of reaching the end of the path I'm on. But that doesn't matter, it's being able to learn that's important. Being able to learn and move closer to the truth of my existence.

My journey has just begun and my life is now filled with the most incredible sense of excitement and happiness. I feel more than I thought would ever be possible. I see breathtaking beauty in the petal of a flower, or the sun lighting up the hills in the afternoon. I've awakened the child within me that loves to play when I practise *asana* and test the possibilities they contain and I can sense the boundaries of who I am, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually and each time I reach them they extend a little further. Nothing inspires me to live more than rolling out my mat each morning.

Yvette Molan began yoga by accident two years ago. Since then she has been attending weekly classes in Canberra under certified yoga teacher, Karen Westlake. Yvette writes to maintain perspective on the changes yoga has brought about. She can be contacted on vettymonster@hotmail.com



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