



An ancient
practice with something
for everyone

by Katie Gantt

By definition, yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines that originated in ancient India. There is no exact birth date on record for yoga, but there is a general consensus among scholars that the practice most likely developed around the fifth and sixth centuries BC. Its history in the east is far reaching and complex, with a narrative spanning many different countries and religions. However, the practice didn't begin making its way to the western world until



in lexington

the mid-nineteenth century when Bengali physician and scientist, N.C. Paul, published *Treatise on Yoga Philosophy*, a book that earned some popularity in both the United States and Europe, in 1851.

The first yogi to actively teach yoga to a western audience, Swami Vivekananda, toured the United States and Europe in the 1890's and got the attention of western intellectuals, including author and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. Pierre Arnold Barnard, an American born yogi,

founded the Tantrik Order of America in 1905. His teachings gave many westerners (outside of the intellectual elite) their first glimpse into the practices of yoga. While its eastern traditions are closely linked to spirituality, yoga in the west became more focused on the exercise derived from the different yoga asanas (postures). The first American "yoga boom" came in the 1960's and a second boom followed in the 1980's when yoga was first medically linked to heart health -- legitimizing yoga as a pure-

ly physical system of health exercises and unconnected to any particular religion. Since 2001, the popularity of yoga in the US has exploded. The number of people who practiced some sort of yoga has grown from 4 million in 2001 to 20 million in 2011, according to Wikipedia.

The benefits of yoga are as extensive as its history. It's touted to promote relaxation, reduce stress and anxiety, improve breathing, focus, and mindfulness and has even been shown in studies to improve some medical conditions such as premenstrual syndrome. It is a low impact exercise and can increase the general health, strength, flexibility, balance and stamina of practitioners of all ages. However, yoga instructors and doctors warn that practitioners should be certain of their instructors' qualifications and that they should also try not to overestimate the ability of their body and strive to do advanced poses before their body is flexible or strong enough to perform them. Pushing the body beyond its limits could result in physical injury. Some of the most common poses resulting in injury include: headstands, shoulder stands, lotus and half lotus, forward bends, backward bends, and handstands.

Evidence of yoga's now international-

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al presence came on December 11, 2014 when the 193-member United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution to establish June 21 as “International Day of Yoga.” The first International Day of Yoga was observed on June 21, 2015 and two Guinness records were established in New Delhi that day: largest yoga class (with 35,985 people) and the record for the most nationalities participating in a yoga class (84).

Yoga in Lexington

Yoga has traveled from India to western civilization, and now specifically, to Lexington, South Carolina. Lexington is home to a handful of locations offering various yoga classes, with something suitable for every age and athletic ability. Try yoga in a gym setting at MUV Fitness; take a class in a traditional yoga studio at Pink Lotus Yoga Center, or attend private and/or small sessions at Two Turtles Yoga. There is something for every Lexington yogi.

MUV Fitness

MUV Fitness offers a range of classes targeting students of all levels of ability. Area Program Director, Bridget Alsup, ensures that there are yoga classes at MUV for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students. They offer Restorative Yoga, which she describes as a “nice, deep stretch class.” There is also Yin, a slower paced class where students hold poses for more extended periods of time, and Vinyasa Yoga. New classes include MUV Yoga Beats – a more eclectic, upbeat class – and Yoga Sculpt, which is being introduced in January. MUV, located across the street from Lexington Middle School, provides students with mats, blocks, and straps, but Bridget says it’s always recommended that students bring their own mats to practice on. Bridget’s own interest in yoga was piqued when she attended her first yoga class at the age of 21. She went to India to complete her teacher certification program and was able to travel the world, taking various types of yoga in different locales. “I really liked the challenge of pushing my body to see what it could do. With yoga it’s always challenging and you’re never done – there is always a new pose to master. There are so many things to be found in a yoga practice whether it’s self-reflection or just taking care of your body.” She adds that one of the biggest things missing in the fitness culture is stretching and that



anyone who works out or lifts weights will immensely benefit from yoga. “You’re only as young as your spine is,” she says.

Pink Lotus Yoga Center

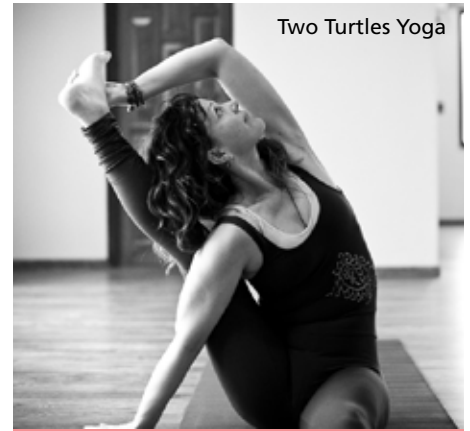
Pink Lotus is enjoying their sixth year of business. Owner, Nicole Zimmer, fell in love with yoga over ten years ago. She had her son in 2008 and was diagnosed with Graves Disease, an immune system disorder of the thyroid, in late 2010. After being prescribed medications with strong side effects, she decided to attempt healing herself through holistic methods. She stopped taking the medicine and began practicing yoga and meditation. “Three or four months into doing yoga every day, with some of that being purely meditation, the doctor told me that my body had cured itself. I said, ‘no sir, it was God and yoga.’ I hadn’t been to church in a really long time, but I went while all of this was going on and had a spiritual experience where I was pretty much told to go open a yoga studio. I got certified and then two months after that, Pink Lotus was born.” Pink Lotus has always been located in Lexington’s Old Mill and offers a range of classes, including: Beginners, Restorative, Slow Flow, Gentle Yin, Vinyasa, Swing, Yoga for Athletes, and about ten more styles. She advises that every physical body is different and that there is a type of yoga suitable for everyone. “It’s a matter of finding which practice is better for you. My only rule is that we have a good time. The thing that people love about Pink Lotus is that we are a family here.”

Two Turtles Yoga

Two Turtles Yoga was founded by owner Dorothy Abercrombie about three years ago. Similar to Nicole at Pink Lotus, Dorothy got serious about yoga when she was diagnosed with a health issue. In this case it was irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Her doctor prescribed her a regimen of medicines and explained that they would not cure the disease, but would treat it. He also informed her that she would probably have to take these medicines for the rest of her life. This did not sit well with Dorothy and she began to research holistic alternatives. With a combination of acupuncture, naturopathic medicine, homeopathy, yoga, and diet therapy, Dorothy healed herself of IBS and discovered a new passion to boot. She went on to earn her BS in Alternative Medicine at Everglades University, while continuing to practice yoga every day. She received her 200-hour teacher certification in yoga a few years ago and is now pursuing an advanced, 500-hour teaching program through Holy Cow in Charleston. Part of the requirements to finish this advanced certification program is that she has to teach a certain amount of hours, and

thus Two Turtles was born. Dorothy's studio is co-located in the Lexington Jiu-Jitsu building off Sunset Blvd. and she intentionally keeps her classes small. She also offers individual instruction because, "We are all individuals with different issues and concerns. Yoga is not a sport, it's an individual practice." She agrees that yoga is for everybody and that you can get whatever you need out of your yoga practice. "If you want mental clarity, yoga has meditation. If you want strength, you get that in yoga through holding poses. If you want movement, there are flow classes. Whatever you want to accomplish, you can accomplish through yoga. Or you can do a little bit of everything" she says.

While the roots of yoga span centuries and continents, it is nice to know that Lexington is home to a variety of locations and classes for those who are interested in testing the waters, starting a practice, or continuing a practice. One thing our Lexington instructors have made clear is that yoga is for everyone and can be utilized in a variety of ways. Yoga can be your medicine, your serenity, your exercise, or even your lifestyle. Try it on for size. ■



Two Turtles Yoga

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