



Episode 6 - New Year's Transformation: How to Create Lasting Change

00:03 Alanna Kaivalya: We all know that our practice makes a huge difference in our life, and we know that committing to our practice is actually gonna make us better yoga teachers and spiritual leaders. In the new year, it is a great idea to re-commit to your own practice, and in this podcast, I'm gonna give you some secrets on how to do that and how to make it easier so that your yoga fits into your life, not the other way around. Welcome to the Modern Mystics podcast, I'm your host, Alanna Kaivalya, the yoga doctor. I'm here to help you realize your potential as a spiritual leader and elevate your work in the realm of yoga, mysticism and spirituality. This podcast covers all of our favorite topics: Yoga, alchemy, astrology, divination, spirituality, psychology, ritual and mystical practices, both ancient and modern. Get ready to uplevel your status as a modern mystic.

01:05 AK: One of the things that I remember being indoctrinated into when I began my yoga practice, and I'm guessing that you probably were too, was that you have to do your practice every day. For a long time, I assumed that that meant I had to push myself as hard as possible, that I had to do as much asana as possible, that I had to touch my feet to my head, bend and stretch, and just essentially twist into a pretzel. I felt guilty if I didn't do this. I felt guilty if I didn't spend 90 minutes to two hours every day dedicating myself to furthering my asana practice. And of course, I was also meditating. And an interesting thing happened there, I had established a regular meditation practice for... Because it was about seven years before I finally realized that even though I was meditating about 20 minutes, twice a day, I wasn't any happier, none of this stuff in my mind was gone, my anger wasn't gone, my frustration wasn't gone, I was just better at putting on a nice glossy facade over all of the stuff that had always been bothering me in my entire life.





02:17 AK: And I share this with you because I'm hoping that it resonates with you on some level or holds some truth, either for you or for some of the students and clients that you work with. We have this long-standing, for lack of a better term, guilt trip, on the fact that we should do our practices every day, on the fact that we should meditate every day. And as I said in my last podcast about the new year, I reminded us that we need to stop shooting ourselves. [chuckle] And also, I encouraged you to let go of resolutions. So if you missed that podcast, make sure you go back and listen to it. And this podcast is a great follow-up because I'm not necessarily trying to get you to do a resolution in committing to your practice, but rather move toward a lifestyle shift. One of the things that I write about a lot, in general, but very specifically, in my most recent book, *Yoga Beyond the Mat*, is how to reframe the way that you do and look at your practice. Your Practice doesn't need to be a 90-minute ass-kicker. In fact, it only needs to be those specific practices that actually make you feel more connected.

03:39 AK: This is the important litmus test that you need to measure everything by: Do the things that you do actually make you feel more connected? So for example, does pushing yourself harder in asana make you feel more connected to your spirit or your soul or source? Does forcing yourself into meditation for any length of time make you feel closer to spirit or source? Now, the answer could be yes and the answer could also be no. So be open to what the answer might be. One of the things that I explored throughout my doctoral work was what actually works for us as modern western people, and modern meaning, those of us who are alive today. So I'm assuming if you're listening to this podcast, you qualify. And western meaning that we were born and were raised in the western half, the western hemisphere of the earth. So there is just a basic difference between the western and the eastern psyche. There's no good or bad here. This isn't a judgement. There's just differences. So the eastern psyche has a different way of learning. It is a learning style that is more





passive and receptive, revering the teacher or the guru.

05:03 AK: In the west, we have a learning style that is more challenging. We like to ask questions. We're always trying to surpass the teacher. We're always encouraged to do critical thinking and think outside the box. Those are very, very different modes of being. There's some other core and fundamental differences between eastern and western psyche, which simply means that we as western practitioners need to do the things that work for us and our psychology. Because if we don't, it can often be like fitting a square peg into a round hole. And that's one of the things that I actually found meditation to be, specifically yogic meditation, and I know that for some listeners that might feel like or sound like blasphemy. It's not, don't worry. Meditation practices abounds. There are meditation practices in nearly every spiritual and religious practice throughout history. So if we don't resonate with one particular meditative practice, there are many others we can try and there are some things that we can do as westerners to help boost our meditation and make it feel more connective for us. Things like actually saying invocations out loud, invoking whatever it is you are connected to, gods, goddesses, the planets, if you're an astrologer, angels.

06:22 AK: Bringing them into your meditation practice makes it feel a little more active and it can actually feel a little more connected in that way. So what I wanna encourage you to do in this podcast is really think outside the box. Shatter those old pre-conceived notions of what your practice should look like. Because the reality is that doing your practice every day is essential for you as a spiritual leader. It's super, super important that you do it. It is you need to be able to tap into the source in order to sustain yourself as you do your work. And if you don't tap into the source, it's like not going back to the well, you will go dry. Okay? You will get thirsty, you will feel sapped, you will feel burnt out. This is absolutely the number one cause of burnout

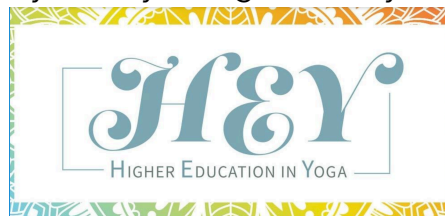




for us as spiritual leaders and practitioners. So it is very imperative that you do a daily practice, but there shouldn't be any guilt associated with it and there shouldn't be any should associated with it. What we want our practice to be like is like brushing our teeth, so hopefully, every day and hopefully twice a day, we all brush our teeth.

07:34 AK: And it's just a part of our everyday routine, it's just this thing that we do. If we happen to miss it one night because we're out and having a good time and we come home and fall asleep, the world doesn't end, no big deal. We may wake up the next morning and our mouth feels a little more fuzzy than usual, but then we'll just get up, brush our teeth and go on about our day. We don't beat ourselves up over it, we don't call ourselves a bad yogi for it, we just do it again and move on. So, let us make our practice like this. It is more like a lifestyle. Your life becomes your practice, your whole life becomes your offering. So, you wake up, you brush your teeth, and maybe you meditate for two minutes, maybe you don't meditate at all, maybe you meditate that evening for a few minutes. Maybe meditation just isn't your jam, maybe you'd rather chant, maybe you'd rather do invocations, maybe you'd rather just relax in child's pose for 30 seconds before you go on about your day. One of my most favorite practices that seems to resonate with a large number of my students is the wake up in gratitude.

08:39 AK: So in the morning I encourage you, even before you get out of bed, literally before anything happens, your eyes are barely open. In fact, when I do this in the morning, I have to turn my lights up enough so I can see my journal, I write down three things that I'm grateful for. And that's it. It takes about 30 seconds. You can literally write one word. So as you can imagine, oftentimes, one of the words I write is Roxy, my little dog, I'm perpetually grateful for her. And the reminder of that gratitude is a fantastic way to start your day. And gratitude is at the root of all positive human emotion. So to begin your day with gratitude, you're actually planting the

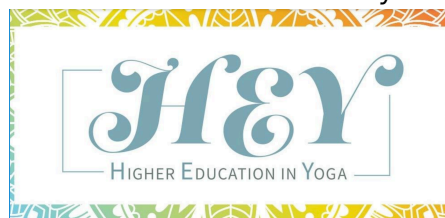




seeds for goodness and positive feelings throughout the day. This is not a bad way to begin your day. And again, it's gonna help you feel connected. And that's what's most important, because it's when we are connected that we have the ability to tap into that mind state, that psycho-spiritual state of yoga. Yoga is a psychology, it is a spirituality, it is a way for us to look upon the world with equanimity and grace.

09:50 AK: So, that's not a unique experience. The psycho-spiritual state of yoga, it's been built up as like this end-all-be-all samadhi enlightenment, "Oh my God, only the masters can achieve it." Totally not true. Blowing that myth right out of the water today. Anybody can have it. And in fact, you have already experienced it in your lifetime. You have absolutely experienced the moment of joy, bliss, ecstasy that we call yoga, or enlightenment, or whatever other word you might use for it. There have been many words for this. It is not the exclusive province of the yoga practice. And that moment, for most of us, is fleeting. But what our practice does is allow us to tap into the state of being that allows that moment to sustain. Because we want that psycho-spiritual state of bliss and yoga to actually be our new normal. We want it to be who we are and how we move through the world every day as much as possible. When you're in that state, you're gonna make great decisions for yourself. And here's another kicker. [chuckle] The goal of yoga is actually not enlightenment, it's not samadhi. Samadhi and enlightenment are just a practice. They're just a state of being from which you're gonna make great decisions.

11:02 AK: If there were a goal to yoga, which really, there's not, but the point of yoga is for us to be able to make these great decisions. The Sanskrit word is Viveka, is one of my favorite Sanskrit words. And Viveka means discernment, it's the ability to choose for yourself what is going to help you lean more toward the light and choose for yourself what is going to help you move away from the darkness. Yeah, those choices are gonna be different for all of us individually. What you choose to help you

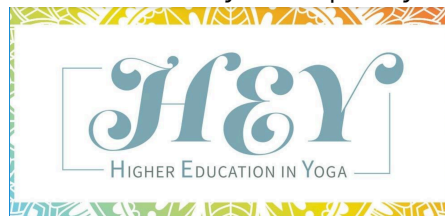




lean toward the light may be very different from someone else's choice. That's why there is no right way. There is no one way to do things, there is no one way to live, there is no one way to eat, there is no one way to be in a relationship, there is no one answer to solve all the world's problems, or even yours. There is merely your answer. And for you to be able to consistently tap into that and create the decision-making process that continuously leads you toward your own version of light, your best self, it's awesome to be in a really blissful, joyful state of mind, and your practice helps you stay in that, your practice helps you remain in this blissful state of mind.

12:15 AK: So, this is really important. So you really do actually wanna do practices that help you stay in the state of mind, that help you stay connected. And they can be simple practices, they don't have to be wheel pose, it doesn't have to be the entire Ashtanga primary series. Trust me, I did that for two years and it did not get me any more enlightened than when I wasn't doing it. [chuckle] So asana is great, but you'll hear me often try to keep it in its place on this podcast. It's not the end-all-be-all. And in fact, it's a very modern derivation of what yoga is. We're a little obsessed with it in the west, and I think it's really time to move past it and let it go, because the true gift of yoga is this psycho-spiritual state of being. And I don't care how well you nail your Warrior Two, I've never seen anybody enlightened in a Warrior Two.

13:05 AK: So let's think about some of the practices that actually make you feel connected. And I mentioned meditation with some invocations, I mentioned even ditching meditations just for invocations, morning gratitude practice, which I call wake up in gratitude. And just as a quick reminder, this month, starting on January 9th, I'm doing a 28-day challenge that actually leads you through creating your own daily practice based on these principles. It's a dollar to join the challenge, and that's all it costs you as long as you finish the challenge. I'm asking you to commit to finishing the 28 days. If you do finish, then you've paid your dollar and you're all set,





and if you don't finish, then you actually commit to paying for the entire course that I take you through during those 28 days. My Total Transformation course, which is \$297. [chuckle] So, it's a little bit of a reverse reward system here. You are rewarded for completing the course and finishing, and if you don't, then your penance is essentially paying for the course. It's been an amazing challenge. This will be my third year in a row doing it. Everyone within my HigherEducation.Yoga membership will be participating with me.

14:17 AK: So if you'd like to join us and commit to a 28-day practice in this style, where I encourage you to do basically as little as possible for you to remain connected. I'll post the link in the show notes here so that you can check it out and join me on this challenge. I would love to have you. What I want you to remember in this new year as you put together a new practice that really resonates with you, is to take stock of the practices that you do every day, or occasionally, that have the most meaning. And don't be afraid if they are not necessarily "specifically yoga practice" or in the field of practice that you like to do. It can really honestly be anything. And, as I said earlier, yoga needs to fit into your life, not the other way around, your spiritual practice needs to fit into your life, not the other way around. So we don't wanna jam up our entire day just because we have to try and fit everything into a 90-minute period. Think about how you might do little bits of your practice all day every day, waking up and writing down three things that you're grateful for, for example, meditating for say, two minutes instead of 20, just doing a child's pose for 30 seconds, if that makes your back feel more open and ready to perhaps sit all day in a chair, if that's what you do for work. Maybe when you're driving to work or commuting to work, just taking a few deep breaths and noticing the breath.

15:50 AK: Perhaps it is being kind to others in a very conscious way. There's really things that you can do all day every day that are super, super helpful and maintaining





this level of deep connection so that you can keep your mind state as elevated as possible, which is so critical for your ability to, again, do this practice of Viveka, this excellent decision-making. The other thing that helps with establishing a daily practice is truly seeing the results. Now, I know that this probably sounds cliché but results actually make a difference for us as human beings and its results that keep us committed to something. It's very, very difficult to maintain discipline or a disciplinary practice if we're not seeing some kind of difference with that practice. So there are things that you can do to test yourself actually, to see where you're beginning now in terms of a baseline of wellness, psychologically, physically, and spiritually speaking. So let me just give you a quick example. Because what I don't want this to be is a reason for us to be competitive with either others or ourselves. It's not about that, especially when we talk about spiritual practice, it's not about who can be "the best."

17:17 AK: There's no best, that's not really a thing. But what there is is a level of health and well-being that is optimal for you, and that's what we're looking for. So one of my favorite physical well-being tests is actually called the sitting-rising test. It's very, very simple. And the test is can you, from a standing position, sit down onto the floor cross-legged without using your hands. And then once you're on the floor cross-legged, can you stand up without using your hands? If you have to use your hands for support, there is basically a point system where the number of times you have to use your hands and whether you use it on your knee or on the floor in order to get up or sit down, creates more points for you and the more points you have, the less long your life will be. It was a team of researchers in Brazil that discovered this correlation between your agile ability to get up and down from the floor and the length and duration of your life. So if you don't have the agility to sit down and get up from the floor, your life is gonna be shorter.

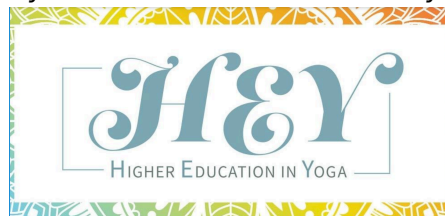
18:28 AK: But what's great is that you can actually improve that ability with basic





stretching and exercises, and it doesn't even have to be yoga asana. Maybe you're over yoga asana, you've done your share of sun salutations and you'd rather do swimming, or cross-training, or spinning, whatever it is. Honestly, it doesn't really matter. [chuckle] Whatever gets you in that zone, elevates your heart rate, works out your muscles, and makes you feel more agile is gonna be great. And if you can do the sitting-rising test, then you know that it's actually improving your well-being. This isn't about washboard abs, this isn't about building up your biceps or trying to run a marathon. This is simply about living an excellent life. Another simple physical test is the plank test. Can you hold a plank for two minutes? Now, of course, normally, we're not going around holding planks for any minutes. [chuckle] But, your ability to simply hold a plank for two minutes is actually indicative of your overall health and well-being. And again, not about washboard abs, but just about your ability to live a happy, pain-free, healthy life.

19:41 AK: So that's one of the ways in which you can test yourself, are the physical practices that you're doing actually helping you. For all that we... For all the credit that we give asana, it isn't the silver bullet that we want it to be, it's just not. It doesn't have a cardio component, I don't care how fast you do your sun salutations. Generally, it's pretty repetitive, there's a lot of repetitive stress associated with asana. There are entire muscle groups that are overlooked and that are not worked in asana, for example, the biceps. We really never work the biceps in asana. We really don't work the upper back in asana. And there's not a lot that works our hamstrings, we stretch them plenty, but we rarely strengthen them. So as far as a physical exercise goes, it's not necessarily full and complete. It's great for many purposes, but it's not a full and complete physical exercise. And I will always encourage you to do cross-training for your asana. There's other tests that measure the baseline levels of your well-being. There's simple stress tests, because the less stressed you are, the more easily you're going to be able to navigate your life, the more resilient you are to things being

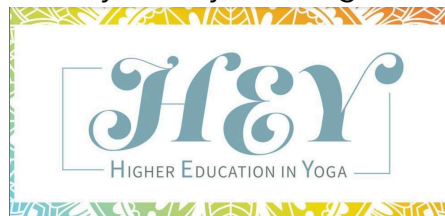




challenging.

20:57 AK: So knowing your stress levels when you start your practice, when you start to really get into your practice, is very helpful because then, two weeks later, or two weeks after that, you can actually see if your practice is having a marked effect on your stress levels. You can also measure your happiness. There is a happiness test, and that happiness test will tell you at the beginning how happy you are. And then in a few weeks, once you've committed to your practice, you'll see if you're a little bit happier. And having these measurements, seeing that there is actually progress gives us as humans, a boost to continue. Because we all know intrinsically that change is good. I know that many of us resist it, and we talked about this in the last podcast, but we wanna embrace change. And when we can measure positive change, we're more motivated to continue. And when we're motivated to continue, it's just easier to continue. So, see if as you commit to your practice in this new year, you can find ways of measuring your results so that you actually see whether your practice is doing anything for you. I mean, it would be very interesting if two weeks from now, you retested yourself and realize that actually you do not have more stamina and you're just as stressed out.

22:20 AK: Well, that's a good signifier that the practices that you're doing are not actually the ones that transform you and that's great data to have. Because you wanna do practices that make a difference in your life. And if it's not nine sun salutations a day, maybe it's something different, maybe the way you're doing your meditation practice needs a bit of an upgrade. Maybe you need to think outside the box in terms of doing simple gratitude practices, or kindness practices, rather than really trying to force feed yourself some sort of yoga practice that you think you "should do." So, once again, I am guiding you through all of this and I do have tests at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of my 28-day challenge. So I do hope that you'll join me





for that. I will put a link in the show notes so check it out and join me. It starts on January 9th. And in the mean time, as you're committing to your practice, remember, ask yourself, "Does this bring me joy? Does this make me feel connected?" And if it does keep it as a practice. And then find little ways throughout your day to bring yoga into your life, because we want yoga, that psycho-spiritual state of joy and connectedness to be our new normal, so that we can make excellent decisions for ourselves and continue to do our best to lean toward the light.

23:42 AK: Thanks so much for listening to this podcast. It's been my pleasure and honor to bring it to you. And if you have enjoyed it, please leave me a review on the place that you found this podcast, wherever you're listening to this podcast. Not only do I really appreciate it, but it also helps others to find this podcast. So thanks again, and I'll look forward to chatting with you on the next podcast. And until then, Namaste.

