

Dena Kingsberg



Flowing with a sweet rhythm, igniting bright lights of insight and inspiring you to be the best version of yourself, Dena Kingsberg's words are a gift. Poet. Singer. Speaker. Teacher. Mother. Dena draws on all of these aspects to deliver a message of self awareness and self empowerment. Having dedicated more than 30 years of study and practice to Ashtanga Yoga, Dena is among the most respected and senior practitioners in the world. Her adept understanding of yoga philosophy, her masterful and lyrical language, her grace and her illuminating example inspire change.

Dena is my teacher.

Dena, your teachings often centre around the theme of transformation.

Why do so many of us feel the need to change?

Life is both precious and fleeting.

If you are finding it a struggle, feeling lost or broken, restless, in pain or discontent, if you are out of sync or out of your mind with worry, stress or fear then change could offer relief.

Is it selfish to dedicate significant time to cultivate your own sense of happiness?

Seeking relief from suffering and cultivating happiness is far from selfish, however expecting others to coexist with you when you are off balance and in a disturbed or agitated state of mind, may well be.

When we are tired, hungry, stressed or feeling low, life is harder. When we are in pain, emotionally or physically, even simple things become overwhelming. This breeds despair and frustration and can result in deeper states of discontent.

If a musical instrument is damaged or out of tune, its capacity to produce quality sound is greatly impaired resulting in dissonance.

People can be like that.

It seems obvious then, there is a need for repairs, maintenance, servicing, cleaning, tuning, and practice. Once restored a clear pure tone is possible.

Yoga can be this process for the human instrument.

How do we start?

At some point, we need to stop blaming others for our situation and start taking note of the part we play in our own reality. To take a good look at oneself and commit to doing the work required to establish balance and to facilitate peace.

A grand spring cleaning of the self may be required.

A letting go of limiting ideas.

A letting go of company that brings you down.

A letting go of habits that don't serve.

Sorting through it all can be messy but the resulting space created will make room for the new, lighter version of you.

For a lot of people, their habits and behaviours, good or bad, feel like permanent aspects of who they are. Is there a way to change or let go of these patterns? Or are we stuck in a loop?

We need to loosen the tight grip we have on ourselves and allow change to be an option.

If moving water can smooth and polish away even the roughest of stone then surely we too can evolve.

Having some understanding of your mind is key to having some understanding of yourself and is pivotal for instigating change.

How often do we question the validity of our thoughts? Especially the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

Firstly we need to appreciate that a thought is just a thought. The fact that we had it, does not automatically mean we need to react or respond to it.

It also does not automatically mean that the thought is reliable, valuable or true.

Here is the loop.

Thoughts trigger feelings, feelings produce thoughts, these thoughts generate words and actions and reactions producing more feelings and more thoughts and so the cycle continues.

We build ideas in our heads and believe them to be true. When actually, so much of what we think is either: superficial: based on a limited amount of knowledge confused: based on information that does not always represent the truth

outdated: based on what we used to think

influenced: based on someone else's idea.

Or simply incorrect: based on a misunderstanding or invalid information.

Behavioural patterns and addictions form deep impressions, like a scratch in the record of our subconscious.

Once we analyse the patterns of thought we have a chance to intervene before the reaction, providing us with the opportunity to make a conscious choice to behave or respond in a different way. This breaks the cycle and facilitates the possibility of tangible change.

How can we create greater harmony in ourselves and in relationships?

Self empowerment reflects our capacity to have some influence and input into the unfolding of our own reality. To ultimately actualise a life well lived.

One where precious moments are experienced fully because we are able to be present and not distracted. Where unnecessary conflicts are avoided because we have disentangled from the internal dramas that create impulsive or unwise words and reactions. Where we have broken the patterns that cycle into negative outcomes and behaviours that result in further discontent.

We need to break the links that chain us to our pain or dissatisfaction so that life can be about more than just survival.

What should we do to nurture happiness?

Cultivate positive thoughts, build relationships with people you admire, and introduce some healthy habits.

If some part of each day is dedicated to self healing, to uplifting the spirit, to cultivating joy and to celebrating beauty, then it will be easier to navigate life's inevitable occasional struggle.

Yoga helps, as does regular sleep, nutritious food, silence, and nature. Taking time to do the things that feed your soul, like dancing or surfing or reading a good book in the winter sun. Knowing what lifts your spirit and allowing yourself a generous serve helps to put you in a good space that causes a chain reaction of positivity.

You recommend a 'yoga practice' and for you, this is Ashtanga yoga. How would you define this practice?

Ashtanga yoga offers a therapeutic methodology designed to promote healing on many levels.

It is a curriculum that involves freeing and strengthening the body, breath, and mind, through repetition and gradual augmentation of specific practices.

Each person moves through a prescribed series of breath synchronised movements in the form of classical asana at an individual pace. The practitioner and their practice evolve symbiotically. The practices progress from the cultivation of physical mobility and stability in asana to the enhancement of the breath capacity through pranayama. Continued concentration evolves into meditative states establishing a settled, more open, connected sense of self.

What begins with great effort over time finds ease, like a song well practiced will reveal and express the union of musician and instrument.

Even simple practice can produce moments of internal harmony.

Yoga does not promise a life without hardship, sorrow, or pain.

But it gives us tools to keep the mind steady through success and failure.

Breath— In your classes and workshops, you bring a strong emphasis to cultivating the breath in and around a yoga practice. Why is a focus on breath so important?

Quality of breath relates to quality of life.

We have all at some point been directed whilst disturbed to take a few deep breaths and appreciate that this helps to restore the mind to a calm state.

“Self empowerment reflects our capacity to have some influence and input into the unfolding of our own reality. To ultimately actualise a life well lived.”

The word inspiration means to inhale. To breathe in. It also means to be inspired, it describes creativity, illumination, and awakening.

To enhance the breath is to enhance these qualities.

A limited breath is characteristic of depressive tendencies.

A restricted or compromised breath is often indicative of respiratory disorder and is intertwined with fear.

Continued exploration and the development of breath capacity and control not only enhances respiratory function but sits at the heart of emotional well being and spiritual connectivity.

Chanting– Anyone who has practiced with you in your shala in Byron Bay, or in a workshop or yoga intensive overseas, would have experienced the beauty of a mantra being gently sung somewhere in the room, or the joy of call and response chanting of a sutra or invocation to a deity at the end of a led class. Have you always loved chanting?

I have not always loved chanting. Like many, I have found that any form of singing, especially in public feels exposing and can be profoundly uncomfortable.

It has taken time to appreciate the deeper layers revealed through this process of voice.

That chanting is like a song that belongs beyond ego or performance.

A kind of singing in whilst singing out. A means to connect with divinity both beyond and within.

Before pen and paper, most ancient wisdom was passed down in the oral form of call and response until the body of work was memorised. Many traditions in India continue to teach this way. It involves firstly listening with refined attention followed by the imitation of the sounds tone and rhythm.

Then contemplation of the meaning or intention and the integration of teachings into daily life.

This entire process is considered a spiritual practice unto itself.

With repetition, we forget ourselves as the healing qualities of sound vibration act like a mother's lullaby to soothe the soul.

Community– How does the practice of ashtanga build community and how important is it?

Those involved in regular practice appreciate the effort and dedication required to sustain it.

This builds the mutual respect that binds our diverse community. We share common principles and aspirations; this results in a quiet understanding, a comradeship on the path to self - discovery and the creation of supportive friendships.

Women– I read an interview where you were quoted saying, “There is nothing more beautiful than a strong woman.” You go on to dismiss the argument that women who have physical strength are not feminine saying, “changes to a female body are only more masculine if you identify strength with the male.” How do you define femininity?

I see femininity as strength balanced with grace, and masculinity as steadiness coupled with tenderness.

Family– Today more than ever, women feel pressure to be everything to everyone – devoted mother, loving wife, successful professional – all without the traditional village or family support we once had. How do we find balance and support in achieving these seemingly overwhelming roles?

You can only ever give your best.

Start by being realistic, and learn to say no to requests that don't serve your primary roles unless they bring you joy.

Reduce quantity, not quality.

Refine attention so that even if the time spent in each role is reduced, the calibre of interaction is not.

If you were not focused on the task at hand the first time, you may end up having to do it again.

Take care not to make promises you know you won't keep. Dealing with disappointment is never fun. Most definitely, do not pick up the phone if you do not wish to talk.

Prioritise your own needs so when you are in company, you can be present, in a good space and without complaint or compromise.

Certainly having it all, a partner, a family, and a profession will be demanding and require endless time and energy but it can also make for a colourful and abundant life.

Future– Are you optimistic about the future?

In a time of cataclysmic global warming and catastrophic leadership, it is difficult to be wholly optimistic about the future. We need to look to now. The future so quickly becomes the past. If we take care of what happens now, if we take responsibility for ourselves and our actions the future will have a chance.

There are so many amazing people doing the work to align themselves with nature, caring for the planet, caring for one another.

They are striving to be the best they can be, lifting their voices and lifting our spirits.

Let's join them.