

»» YOGA VIBE: BRINGING YOGA TO THE HEART OF PEOPLE'S HOMES AND LIVES

Though Julia Ray has taught in a myriad of institutions and public environments, the centre focus of her work has evolved to bringing yoga to the heart of people's homes and lives and to mold a yoga practice unique to their individual dynamics and needs.

Julia reported, "I'm continuously fascinated by people's life experiences. This may be partly why I love working with people so much. How I came to yoga is interesting, so I'll start with that. Over 10 years ago I use to be a top-notch project manager for an overly busy leading design firm. My homeopathic doctor urged me to start practicing yoga or risk having a nervous breakdown. I complied. I came out of my first yoga class feeling normal, which I hadn't felt in a long while. Something happened that I could not rationally explain. Little did I know that my life and career path would be changed forever! I decided to further explore what I just experienced and started practicing four times a week, and shortly afterwards I signed up for my first teacher training. I always compare my encounter with yoga to falling in love—really it was so much like falling in love. Even though there's always choice, if I was to honor my heart, I had to follow it, and in that regard it felt like I had no choice but to go—plunging into the unknown. That's what happened to me. That's how it all started. I left a good stable salary as a project manager (I have a degree in Economics from the University of Toronto) to pursue my love for yoga. This career change was a huge risk because I was supporting myself and essentially starting life all over again."

Julia's yoga journey has continued to stay interesting. She has never stuck to one tradition but has made it her mission to learn as much about the field from all perspectives as possible. Her extensive training includes: Ashtanga Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Core Yoga, Anusara Yoga, Vinyasa/Flow Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Restorative Yoga and Meditation. This diverse background has led her to study with many great teachers and some founders of the popular styles of yoga today including: Sri Pattabhi Jois, Hart Lazer, Ana Forrest, Danny Paradise (who teaches celebrities like Sting and Madonna) as well as fantastic Toronto-based teachers Monica Voss, Tama Soble and Cynthia Funk.

Julia explained, "If I look back, this desire seemed to grow the more I learned over the years. My eyes would try to identify what was similar and what was unique in the various forms of yoga, as well as, how and who this serves. I could never imagine committing myself to one tradition and missing out on what the others had to offer. After all, each and every one of us has something unique to offer,

and yoga is a continuously growing evolving practice—at least in my world. I have always had this desire to broaden my knowledge through direct experience. The more I understand the versatility of yoga, the more I am able to better communicate yoga to my audience, no matter who is seated before me."

The yoga that we practice must match who we are today and guide us towards the next unfolding. "Yoga teaches us to become more flexible. I apply this principle to myself by asking 'How flexible am I in adapting what I learn from life and others to the here and now.'"

Julia knows that in order to have flexibility and options, we must have knowledge, and even more important is embodied wisdom. Studying the various styles of yoga has been an important part of her journey, as have the various teachers with whom she has studied. Through these experiences she has realized the oneness of yoga. Ultimately the various postures, breathing, and meditation tech-



What we cultivate in yoga, we bring to the world. It is that simple, whether we are conscious of this or not. That is one of the most beautiful parts of this practice. The many ways that yoga touches our lives is very unique and individual. We can improve, one at a time. It is up to us.



INTEGRATING MIND BODY HEART SPIRIT

niques are fairly similar. What differs from teacher to style can be compared to jazz: the various musicians come along and improvise the music already created by others before them.

Julia's further interest in understanding how the body works led her to become a certified cranial sacral therapist, which she calls 'yoga of the hands.' She has also taken courses on anatomy and the body in motion as well as bioenergetics. Nowadays she is actively educating herself in brain science. Most recently she attended professional training in neuroplasticity with Dr. Norman Doidge. Neuroplasticity has to do with how the brain changes itself. This cutting edge science further validates the potential of yoga.

Julia's enthusiasm was obvious as she shared why she integrates two other elements of her experiential knowledge. "As a movement facilitator, I find the body is endlessly intelligent in finding ways to heal or free or balance itself and so naturally I am interested in using self guided movement as yet another effective way of tapping into the body's innate wisdom. I gently encourage my clients to allow their bodies to find variations on yoga postures and movements that uniquely help them to move deeper into their practice." Music is another extremely important aspect of her yoga teachings. Being a DJ enables her to pull together a variety of soundscapes from around the world as a part of the yoga experience.

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"I have brought yoga to various environments: workplaces, colleges, schools, dance studios, shiatsu clinics, gyms as well as international spa resorts. My most important trip was to Belize where I was hired to build local capacity for yoga by training a local resident (with over 30 years of personal yoga practice from books) to become a teacher. My mission was to fully equip Santos to bring yoga to the nearby villages and resorts that had no access to yoga teachings. While in Belize I recorded a complete yoga practice CD as supporting material for Santos and as a way of honoring our journey together."

Julia continued, "My experiences have led me to realize that the most effective way of sharing yoga with others is one on one in private and semi-private sessions. Today most of my work is focused on bringing yoga to the heart of people's homes and lives. Perhaps this is the one traditional bone in my body since yoga was originally taught this way."

Each and every person is treated uniquely. Julia works with her clients to co-create and meet the requirements of the moment. Dialogue is encouraged in all directions: with each other and within the body.



“We embark on a journey together realizing that it is a process that takes time. Once we accept that, we are able to relax into the process and observe what comes from it,” Julia explained. “What is exciting is to witness the rippling affects of yoga over time. Not to overromantize the possibilities (though it is hard considering my history with yoga) but, some clients do experience obvious transformations and other clients notice slight but steady improvements over time. What I am referring to is not only musculo-skeletal changes, because yoga touches us in many ways. How can we promote peace in the world if we have never experienced peace in the body? Or Love? How can we walk with love and compassion if we haven’t ever experienced it in the body? My clients have achieved a marked level of success in their chosen professions and communities and so their presence and influence may be widespread. What we cultivate





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Julia is the founder of Yoga Vibe, which is short for vibration. She said, "Vibe' is perhaps the only adjective I've wanted to attach to yoga, other than freedom. With a challenging and compassionate teaching approach, my mission is to continuously inspire my clients to discover their endless potential through deep, integrated releasing, stretching and strengthening of mind-body-heart-spirit. As a Registered Yoga Teacher, I love the process of supporting my client's particular needs and guiding them towards greater health and wellness." ■