CHANGING ROADS

"When and how did you start yoga?" That is the most common question I get from friends, colleagues and acquaintances. The real answer is something I've never shared before. The truth is, yoga has been a part of my life since the very first day my personality started getting forged.

Photo by Guillaume Nallet

I remember this little, beloved word in my head that I kept repeating to myself throughout the years: “balance.” Balance was the word that calmed and comforted me throughout every situation and every experience I faced. It was a strong mantra I always carried with me, and it’s not surprising that it led me to one of my lifetime passions today — yoga.

The reason I said "one of my lifetime passions" is because I was blessed enough to discover two so far. Since I was a little girl, freedom has always been my best friend. It is something so sacred to me that it needs to be manifested and felt in everything I do. Hence, traveling became one of my earliest passions. I wanted to fly and explore and feel free in my skin. I argued with my mom while still at school, telling her time is running fast, and I want to be traveling the world by now. So I did.

I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in travel and tourism and joined Emirates Airline’s cabin crew, where I worked for almost seven years. I am proud to say I traveled the world in my twenties. I got exposed to more than 150 different nationalities and cultures every single day. Constantly during this period, my eyes witnessed the surreal beauty of this planet, with all its richness and hidden gems.

I’ve lived in a multicultural environment. I used to shop in Bangkok, get my hair cut in Germany, bike around in Sydney, swim in Mauritius, and get my tea from Harrods. My love life was as diverse as my lifestyle and the endings as painful as their peaks. Yes, it was a roller coaster. A huge one, a very entertaining one, and at the end of the adrenaline rush, the landing was blue.

I metamorphosed from being a butterfly into an account manager, embracing the corporate world while locked behind a desk. To be honest, at first I enjoyed this life of routine — sleeping every night in the same bed and at around the same time. My nights and days were back to normal, and my body clock was reset.

But slowly the poison of the desk posture started to affect me. This time, it wasn’t the radiation from the plane over a long-haul flight, not the cabin pressure messing with my organs. It was that evil, bent-down shoulder posture my body suffered while meeting every client’s needs and deadlines. This time, I was dealing with a pressurized office instead of a cabin.

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Words cannot convey the value of yoga — it has to be experienced.

I needed to liberate myself from this harmful lifestyle. It didn’t suit my flight attendant, catwalk body type at all. That is when yoga entered my life and stayed there religiously. I began my journey with the simple intent of stretching and destressing. Little did I know that I would eventually find myself addicted to a healthy lifestyle, which, as you know, is now my second passion. Yes, I am a zealous yogi in love with yoga in all its forms.

As B.K.S. Iyengar, the author of the classic, “Light On Yoga,” once said, “Words cannot convey the value of yoga — it has to be experienced.” Yoga was outgrowing me physically as well as emotionally. Every asana was an answer to my past experiences, struggles, doubts and weaknesses. My yoga journey was mirroring my life journey, teaching me patience, discipline, dedication, hope, acceptance, and cleanliness of body and mind.

I discovered that our attitudes towards life have their physical counterparts in our body and, with my daily practice, I began to unlock and liberate capacities I never thought I had. And it felt close to magic! My posture rose. I started to fall in love with this timeless, pragmatic science that was dealing with my physical, moral, mental and spiritual wellbeing. I began experiencing the real meaning of fulfillment and contentment through stillness of the mind I achieved with pranayama and pratyahara. I was feeling light, positive and grateful even for the littlest things in my life.

And the more I felt this way, the more I was showered with blessings. My diet started to change and, soon enough, all I wanted to eat was something green and healthy, just to complement the healthy feeling I had inside. The lethargic feeling that had been killing me after a long day was finally gone. I was feeling fresh again. I was fond of every sattvic ingredient I came across and discovered the rich dish varieties made from superfoods that my body could indulge in. I was living in complete harmony without extremes; some days I enjoyed a salad, others, a cupcake.

Through yoga, I went back to basic and organic, to root and earth — the foundation of every vigorous growth. I learned that material is temporary and core is infinite. I learned that self-development is a journey, not a goal. I learned to let go of my past, not to worry about my future, and live in the present.

My heart began to heal. I was empowered like a warrior. Fearless in letting go of the materialistic corporate world, and stepping into the real journey — my journey.

By Sally Rached

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Sally Rached is a devoted yoga instructor whose true aspiration is to inspire people around her to be happy. She hopes to do just that through her role as a yoga instructor, one day with her own yoga studio. She has traveled the world as a member of an airline cabin crew and was an account manager at a Dubai-based advertising agency.

Photo by George Durzi

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