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rising lotus yoga

by nancy nazarian

with practice our souls rise like a lotus above muddy water

If you sit long enough in the discomfort of asana you will rediscover the truth that yoga is a rebel's practice. Inside this heart center, where the walls of corporations begin to crumble, sits Rising Lotus Yoga. The budding child of business partners Daniel Stewart and Claire Hartley, this studio is the counter to corporate yoga.

Rising Lotus celebrates its one-year anniversary this month with calm and resilience. When Claire left New York for Los Angeles, and Daniel set aside his master's thesis in psychology, they had little idea what to expect when they decided to open the studio. A true mom and pop endeavor, Rising Lotus seeks to capture the whole of yoga as it extends beyond the physical and into the realm of all things psychological, emotional and spiritual. "We wanted a temple," Claire and Daniel chime together.

The vinyasa flow classes offered at Rising Lotus will challenge your body and your heart. At times getting on the mat might be the most difficult step, stirring discomfort before you've taken your first asana. Engaging this sensation, "choosing to look inward, even when you're afraid" is when the relationship to the truth begins, Daniel says. By breaking ourselves open again and again, returning to the basics and transforming everything, we begin to let joy rise.

From this philosophy sprouts the studio's loyal community. With a growing student base, the true charm of it rests in kinship. As an independently owned operation, Rising Lotus relied on its students to help build this temple. From the beautiful lotus adorning their awning to the construction and painting of the studio, its community rose to the occasion and took part in the creation of their future sanctuary. Hardly five weeks after opening the studio, Claire found that she and her husband were pregnant. "To create you have to be in the act of creation," she says of that experience. As the community engaged in acts of physical creation, which helped Rising Lotus to first open its doors, they in turn manifested a studio to help further create or deepen their practice.

"We would love to see more yoga coming off the mat," Daniel beams, as he thinks about the coming year of Rising Lotus. The studio looks to create more community activism with collaborations, workshops and fundraising events. When all is said and done, our relationship to the world relies on our relationship with ourselves, because what is happening internally is manifesting outward. "We are not all going to get enlightened when the whole world and the outside world are peaceful," Claire insists. Instead, when we have peace within

ourselves, we will see it in the world. The responsibility of change can be overwhelming, however each individual can take a deep breath, love his or her surroundings and give a little back to the earth.

Though both Daniel and Claire agree that one cannot set out in search of raising awareness in others, they do believe they can raise awareness within themselves, hopefully living by example. "We're all waiting in a big long line for life to somehow begin, in some way," Claire says. "Aren't we all suffering on some level, in some way?" Daniel adds. Through yoga we can rise from the darkness, step into the moment and realize we are here.

In union with their community, Daniel Stewart and Claire Hartley have transformed an empty room and created a sacred space. Like the lotus rising above the muck and muddy waters, Rising Lotus Yoga serves to illuminate joy by awakening the spirit, because this moment is the only moment we have to create anything.

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