

Mat Love Stories #4 - *Sally Parkes*

My first yoga class was in my teen years and held at my local leisure centre with a teacher called Faye. She was senior in her years, strong and graceful. The asana she taught was gentle, but I could feel it was subtly powerful and not like anything else I'd experienced before. I was used to the feeling of exercise, but this was different and intriguing. It wasn't long before I noticed that my moods were more stable and I felt more calm; the world simply seemed to make more sense. Needless to say, my mat soon became my sacred space, and I knew I was hooked for life.

I went on to discover other forms of yoga including the Iyengar method and the Ashtanga Primary series. There was something wonderfully structured about these practices and as a young woman who had felt unanchored for most of her life, it felt amazing to finally have routine and something to work on and towards all at the same time. I did quickly learn however, that yoga is not all about feeling relaxed and calm and that, for me, it was more about committing to the challenges that asana and pranayama bring to the surface. As my body experienced the new (to me) yoga asana, many tears would arise on the mat. My inner wisdom told me that it was good, that it was necessary, and so I continued to observe and work through the emotional and physical pain that the asana was moving and shifting through my energy systems. The yoga mat felt like a safe place for this to happen, and I was grateful to my teachers for helping to facilitate this. My mat was (and still is) my secure place to just 'be', and I was so appreciative for this as I moved through what I now see as my first spiritual transformation.

As I moved into my thirties, however, I still enjoyed the focus of a more heated practice, but my yoga naturally became intermittent, with a more gentle approach. The heavy



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weight of anger and anxiety that I had previously carried with me in my solar plexus and chest area had been released and my body quite literally

ached for a softer and more nurturing style of yoga. That's when I discovered the teachings of Uma Dinsmore-Tuli which opened up a whole new world of yoga



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to me, the yoga of acceptance. All of a sudden, so much self-judgement dropped away and no longer did I feel that I had to 'do my best' every time I got on my mat. I acknowledged

that my previous approach to my practice had served its purpose and it was time to move on.

My mat soon became a haven for working with whatever energy I had on the day, working with cycles, the planets and my own. Tension eased from my body and my mat became a restful place as my heart started to open; my second spiritual transformation.

I am 44 years young now and my yoga mat still remains both a transformative tool and a best friend. I don't always like what it has to show me, but I know that like any good friend, some days

it's going to nudge me in a new direction, and other days, simply accept me as I am. And because of this, it is also a relationship of gratitude and one that I will continue to build for the rest of this lifetime. ☺

@sallyparkesyoga runs yoga teacher trainings and is the author of the bestselling book The Manual of Yoga Anatomy

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