

accidental anatomist

Yoga educator Leslie Kaminoff believes that the breath and the lab of the human body are our greatest teachers.



Having taught yoga for 30 years, Leslie Kaminoff is now enjoying the success of his book, *Yoga Anatomy*. A “hard-core New Yorker,” who balances time between the city and the country, he founded The Breathing Project in New York—a nonprofit education organization and studio devoted to preserving the one-on-one student-teacher relationship—where he spends four days of the week. He spends the other three at home in Massachusetts with his wife, Uma, and two sons. (A third son lives away from home.)

How did you discover yoga? I wanted to dance but have two left feet. So I looked for something else that would allow me to reimagine my body. I took my first Sivananda Yoga class in 1978, was sleeping in a tent in Canada to do teacher training in 1979, and ran the Sivananda Center on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles in '81 and '82. I didn't agree with formal education, but yoga was perfect for me. It put me directly in touch with something I could learn from: my own

body, not intermediaries. In 1987 I met T.K.V. Desikachar, who rocked my world, so I studied with him. Yoga's the only job I've ever had.

You call yourself a yoga educator instead of a yoga teacher or a therapist. Why? “Teacher” is generic and associated with yoga teacher training programs; “therapist” misrepresents. I don't want turf battles with physical therapists or psychotherapists. There should be another term. We are educators. I want yoga training in our educational systems. Larry Payne's Yoga Therapy Rx program at Loyola Marymount University is a step in the right direction.

You teach “rational yoga.” What's that? I say that to distinguish what I do from other approaches. Many other teachers are rooted in an Indian tradition, but I don't think we derive our authenticity from ancient texts. Is yoga dependent on a particular geography or point in history? Early yogis were humans who had to oxygenate—thinking, breathing bodies living on planet Earth and dealing with gravity, nothing more. Ancient teachings are true inasmuch as they relate to reality. What's reality? As an atheist, I don't feel the need to extend my concept of spirituality beyond the material plane.

So you're not seeking the mystical aspect of yoga? I am explicitly a nonmystical person. My sense of spirituality is derived from my sense of spirit, my breath, the life force I can't stop. I don't need a deity or altar. I just need skin, bones, diaphragm. I have no choice about whether to take the next breath. But I have a choice about how I relate to that fact. We're all in search of more goodness and less suffering. We have to make choices about the food, people, and practices that are appropriate for us. We need to learn about space and boundaries. Within those, there is all this freedom you can find. The main guidepost is always the breath. ❀