

merry maker



Anusara Yoga founder John Friend mixes serious alignment with a great sense of humor.

Alignment? Every style of yoga has something to offer. But in alignment-oriented styles, I kept hearing instructions that led to big openings. Instead of memorizing instructions for each pose, I wanted a set that applied to every pose. I came up with a template of five different sequential, progressive steps. If you apply these principles, you'll enjoy improved alignment and benefit physically. You'll have greater evenness of mind. You'll feel your connection with the environment and others, which leads to feelings of compassion and connection, and greater knowledge of the beauty and goodness of life.

What do you want people to know about Anusara? Our Tantric philosophy is life enhancing, prosensuality, inspiring, uplifting. We want to empower students and emphasize community.

With your positivity, how do you reconcile the problems of suffering and evil in the world?

Everything in its essence is benevolent, good, and auspicious. But we do actions that aren't skillful. Everyone wants to be happy, but we misbehave or misspeak and cause pain for ourselves and for others. There's karma and interconnect-edness, cause and effect, reasons for everything. Sometimes things seem random and unfair. The interweavings of the tapestry of destiny and karma are beyond my view. Some mysteries we don't have to figure out. We just flow with them and respond in the best ways to connect with our spiritual essence.

Are you happy? Yeah, I'm blissed out. I'm dancing better with the Divine all the time. ❖

John Friend leads the Anusara Grand Gathering (September 19–22) at the 15th annual Yoga Journal Colorado Conference. See yjevents.com.

A rib-tickling comic. A no-nonsense alignment guru. A brand-building MBA. Put them together and you get John Friend, whose heart-centered Anusara Yoga is now taught by more than 1,000 teachers in 70 countries. Friend, 51, often uses goofy voices to relate profound concepts and refers to his students as the Merry Band (a nod to Robin Hood? Ken Kesey?). Amid the laughter, you'll find a man who's serious about sharing the benefits of yoga with the world.

How did you come to yoga? When I was four years old, Kennedy got shot. November 22, 1963. I was sick. My mother fed me whiskey and honey and put me in front of the TV. So I was in an altered state of consciousness when my shows were preempted by the Dallas tragedy. Watching the funeral caused me deep questioning about the meaning of life. Why would we be created to have it all taken away? I kept asking questions. When I was eight, my mom read me stories about yogis with supernatural powers. These guys were better than my superheroes! When I was 13, I bought the Bhagavad Gita and some Upanishads. I studied hatha yoga and comparative religions throughout high school. Over the years, I've studied with B. K. S. Iyengar, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, K. Pattabhi Jois, and T. K. V. Desikachar. When I was 20, I started to teach. Since 1990, I've taught internationally. On August 15, 1997, I founded Anusara.

How did you develop Anusara Yoga's Universal Principles of

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