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Yogis of Faith, Part 2: Restoration


written by Jennifer Oliver OConnell | Oct 22, 2016



LOS ANGELES, October 21, 2016—The human body is an amazing instrument, and Yoga not only platforms maximizes this, but unlike other workouts, it also brings out the beautiful body that is unique to each person. With yoga, you don't become a carbon copy of a "sculpted body"; you become more of your *authentic* self. The result for the believer (and perhaps those who do not), is that it builds and deepens an appreciation and newfound care for the gift God has given.

The Fall of Adam and Eve outlined in Genesis 3 produced brokenness on many levels. Biblical commentators often focus on the broken communion with God or the broken communion with each other, but many bypass broken communication with the created realm, specifically, our own bodies. Genesis 3:10 points to the disconnect and ultimate shame with our bodies that the original sin produced: "He [Adam] replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. *I was afraid because I was naked.*'" (emphasis mine)

How does this disconnect affect the human condition today? Substance abuse, pushing our bodies past their limits time and again, filling our bodies with food that we know is not good for us; we fail to praise, honor, or appreciate what God has produced in us. Along with this lack of appreciation and care, we deny, ignore, or act as though there is nothing wrong with our dishonoring behavior—until things go terribly wrong.

 Janina and Her husband

Janina Malbon was a poster child to the depths of bodily disconnection. “I had a landscaping business for 10 years, and toward the end—the last three—I was a n

It took a toll on my body. I was almost 60 pounds heavier, I could barely stand upright. I had lower back prob disc degeneration. And there was nothing other than surgery that could cure my back. I was even getting cortisone injections in my spine. I literally couldn’t stand up straight. On Vicodin, Soma, all kinds of things.”

Her husband already had a Hot Yoga practice and would encourage Janina to participate with him, but Janir resisted. “I was doing the landscaping. It was 106 degrees outside, under the sun I’m planting, digging, pouring concrete—the idea of being out in the sun all day, and then come home and go do Yoga? You’ve got to be kid

But a good friend confronted Janina about her declining health. “[My] friend basically told me, ‘You are killin yourself. You really need to evaluate whether or not you can continue to do this.’” Janina took this to heart, and started out with non-heated Yoga, but ultimately gave in to her husband’s coaxing, and tried Hot Yoga. “And that moment—it was the weirdest thing—I was just totally hooked from first class. Even though I spent most the time lying on the mat, because the heat totally overwhelmed me. But there was something inside, just lik this shift. And it was like, this is my home, this is where I need to be—this feels good. Even though I knew it w going to be hard to do.”

Janina “retired” from full-time landscaping, and began a consistent focus on her Yoga practice. “I felt better. started taking better care of myself. I took a whole year off and figured I would get myself together physical emotionally, and just see where I am at the end of that year. At that same time, the teacher training came in. wanted to know more, and I wanted to really explore this, so that’s kind of how I got started. I just had no ide where the path would take me, but it was where I needed to be, and I knew it. It felt home.”

The path ultimately led to Janina becoming an instructor and manager of Hot Yoga Haven in Santa Clarita, C “When I took the teacher’s training, I took it with the view that it would be kind of fun to teach, but never wi the idea that I would actually teach. Because that totally goes against who I was: I never talked to more than

or three people at a time, I didn't like big crowds, never spoke—in fact, I would do anything not to. So it was a transformation for me.”

Discovering physical healing, discovering her true body and how to care for it, then discovering that she could motivate others. But for Janina, the discoveries did not end there. “It's funny, because when I started doing yoga, I never equated it to anything other than trying to heal my own body. I never really thought of it as a spiritual practice. And of course, it's more about that. Obviously I've done some things to heal my own body, but the spiritual practice has been a wonderful gift that I did not expect, and did not know anything about.”

That gift to the soul has been a balm of healing on multiple levels. Janina expounded on this: “I think in accepting myself for who I am, the inner peace it's given me. Since I was about 18, I've done a lot of therapy, because I've had a lot of issues in my life, a lot of insecurities, and a lot of dysfunction in my really early life. [I've spent my adult life] always trying to figure out who I am. Now, instead of always looking outward for that recognition and acceptance, I really have found that through Yoga. And that's the gift of going and working out, thinking that you're doing something good for the outside of the body, and finding out how it heals your soul too.”

Janina was raised in the Catholic Church, married there, and raised her children in the faith. But the horrific discoveries of priestly molestations and the church's poor handling of them led to her disappointment and ultimate disconnect from the church. “I still consider myself a Catholic, but because of all the stuff that happened through the church, I was very disappointed—it was very painful. I explore, I read the Bible, I guess I do it on my own; but I don't feel as though I am in a place to reach out and participate in the community.

“Learning about the Yamas and the Niyamas, it gives me other ways of verbalizing what it is that I'm going through on my own, and giving me some direction.”

Yoga's focus on being present on the mat, quieting the mind, attention to breath, and its connection to each posture produces the refining effect of introspection. It is inevitable that examination occurs, and though that starts with our body, it ultimately translates to our emotional and spiritual states. The very essence of Yoga is “union”. Without at first realizing it, Janina became an active participant in the integration of her entire being.

“I think I've never really taken the time to turn inward. So to me now, when people talk about being addicted to the Yoga, I think they think of it as the physical practice. I don't think they really understand quite yet; and of

course they go hand-in-hand, but I think so many people don't realize that they are actually stopping, turning inward, quieting the mind. And that's the "addiction" that I don't think they even realize." ^

Because of this healing and reconnection to her body, soul and spirit, she feels there will be a day when she can reconnect to a church community.

"The more I explore, the more I feel that there's going to be some place where I am going to feel the need to reconnect back. And I'm not sure where that's going to take me, but I know I'm going to need a bigger community. And I know that's coming, I'm just going to let it, I'm not going to force it—it's going to happen when it happens when it's time."

In the meantime, she delights in seeing this physical and spiritual path of discovery in her students. "When a student will come up to me and say, 'Oh, I'm so addicted to this!' I kind of smile because I think, *Do they know they're there yet?* Because they think it's the physical and I really think it's the spiritual that they are not clued into. As it was with me. I did not know that this was the gift it was going to bring me. So that's my favorite part about teaching and why I got into it: to expose people to this journey that they might not even know that they are taking. Or they might know, and to watch the growth and be this very small part of it. It's *wonderful!*"

You can find Janina at [Hot Yoga Haven](#) helping to guide others on their restorative and transformational journeys.




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JENNIFER OLIVER OCONNELL

Jennifer Oliver OConnell offers witty, insightful, and direct opinion, analysis and musings on local and national politics and popular culture, with occasional detours into reinvention, fo

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