

## Zone In

The yoga sessions that I enjoy the most are the ones where I become so intently focused that I “zone out”. The chatter in my mind stops. The teacher’s words seem to come from far away and I register them on a very deep, almost unconscious level. I move through the postures as if in a trance or in deep meditation. At the end of class I feel very relaxed, calm, contemplative and serene, and this sense of peace stays with me for hours.

The phrase “zone out” has a bit of a negative connotation, unfortunately, and is generally used to indicate that someone has stopped paying attention, rather than someone who is deeply focused inwards. Perhaps the phrase “zone in” is a little better. Whatever you want to call it, how do you bring yourself to this level of deep focus in class?

First, be sure you take the time you need to get settled and take care of any needs you have before class starts. For more information on this, see the February article, “Arriving at Your Practice”.

During centering, at the beginning of class, take time to observe your breath just as it is then gradually begin to let it slow, becoming longer and more relaxed. When practice begins, try to stay connected with the breath. Use the Ujaii breath if you know it (or ask your teacher to how practice it) and let your ears help you stay connected to your practice by actively listening to your own breath and the sound of your hands and feet on the mat as you flow from pose to pose.

The eyes are another aspect of focus. In some practices you can keep your eyes closed quite a bit. For example if you are practicing a series of poses lying on the floor, you will probably find that it is just as easy to practice with your eyes closed. During standing or seated poses, allow your gaze to alight on a drishti, or “point of focus”. I usually pick the first thing I see as I come into each pose and keep my eyes on that spot, allowing the eye muscles to relax so that I am gazing at the point rather than actively looking at it or staring at it. Allowing the gaze to wander around during class gets the mind thinking and frequently leads to comparisons (both positive and negative) with other yogis that in turn fire up the ego, and suddenly your practice is for something other than yourself.

If you find yourself distracted by thoughts in the mind bring yourself to the present moment. Say to yourself “I’m practicing yoga, I’m in triangle pose right now, I’m reaching through the fingers...”. Try to keep your thoughts directly related to where you are and what you are doing. Don’t allow yourself to be distracted by past or future events. You may find that you have to bring yourself back to the present over and over again. This is perfectly normal and is, in fact, the process of meditation; bringing yourself to the present moment over and over again until you can remain focused for longer and longer periods of time.

If you need to leave your mat to go to the washroom or when going to collect props for savasana, try to maintain your focus. Don’t engage others in conversation. Stay quiet and remain aware of your movements, your body, and your breath. Try to make everything that you do in the studio part of your yoga practice. The deep sense of calm you leave with will be well worth the effort.

Enjoy your practice!