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Profile of a Kripalu Yoga Teacher by Jessica L. Atcheson



Abby Schwab describes Kripalu Yoga as “yoga for life”—accessible and adaptable for all ages and all phases of life. It makes sense, then, that this Kripalu Yoga teacher recently found herself collaborating with a family therapist on a series of stress-reduction workshops for teenagers and elementary school children, exposing kids early to the myriad benefits of yoga practice.

She credits her involvement in the program to her training at Kripalu, where she received both her 200-hour and 500-hour certification. “I never, ever would have done that if I hadn’t done my training at Kripalu,” she says, highlighting one of the ways that the Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training—the 500-hour certification in particular—has enabled her to bring her personal passion for yoga into her community.

Yoga has changed Abby Schwab’s life. First introduced to the practice in high school by her stepmother, she drifted away from yoga in college but picked it up again for the physical benefits—flexibility and strength—when she was training for triathlons. She relished the other benefits as well: stress relief, a strengthened connection to her inner wisdom, and patience in the midst of raising two kids with her husband.

Yoga has even shifted her experience of epilepsy, which she was diagnosed with at age 13. “One of the most amazing things that has come to me through my personal practice is the reduction of seizures,” she says. “With the seizures that I do have, they’re much more mild. And I’m able to reduce the length of a seizure by coming into a calming pranayama.”

Abby enrolled in the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training to deepen her practice and learn

the fundamental tools to teach an ongoing class. That immersion, in the spring of 2007, was pivotal. Abby reflects, “My mother said to me that she always felt that I was a very natural teacher, and that once I found yoga and started teaching yoga, it was like I found myself.”

As yoga has transformed Abby’s life, so has the 500-hour training at Kripalu transformed her teaching. Having increased the number of classes she was teaching, she began the 500-hour certification program in July 2008 to expand her knowledge and further develop her classes.

Giving teachers the opportunity to hone their expertise and continue their education, the 500-hour training is made up of four 9-day in-depth modules that cover a range of topics, including pranayama, advanced postures, experiential anatomy, and teaching to special populations. “Each module is absolutely transforming in its own way,” Abby says. “The differences between them are so vast in some ways, and yet, the similarities between them are also so binding that it always feels like you are coming back to some sense of security. I felt like I had been transformed on a cellular level—physically, emotionally, every layer of my being felt truly transformed.”

What ties the modules together is a practical emphasis on how the teachers can bring that transfor-

mation back to their students.

Abby also found continual inspiration and encouragement: “One of the incredible strengths of the Kripalu training is the variety of teachers that you work with. It doesn’t take long for you to realize that you are in an atmosphere of support and nurturing unlike any other.”

Each year, more than 70 yoga teachers graduate from the 500-hour certification, ready to teach in a whole new way. “I see both the depth and breadth of their yoga increase and their understanding of all different kinds of bodies broaden,” says Devarshi Steven Hartman, Dean of the Kripalu School of Yoga, “and I see 500-hour students really come into their own as teachers.”

Abby recounts how she has been able to shift her classes away from a focus on only the physical body. “I feel a little braver, more confident in terms of opening up my classes to things really beyond a physical practice. I feel like my classes are much more well-rounded and come back to the balance between mind, body, and spirit. I really believe it is the 500-hour modules that have given me the confidence and knowledge to expand in that way.”

After each module, Devarshi has students exclaiming, “That was the best module ever!”—exactly what he wants to hear. “People are

loving the modules so much that the moment they’re finished they want to know what’s next,” he says. Soon there may be a clear-cut answer to that question: Devarshi is working with Kripalu Professional Trainings to develop a 750-hour certification curriculum to be launched in 2011.

As for Abby Schwab, who finished her 500-hour certification in August, she is teaching 10 yoga classes a week at four yoga and fitness studios in eastern Massachusetts, as well as workshops on restorative yoga, partner yoga, and arm balances, and a six-week series for women, covering a variety of topics—not to mention the stress-reduction workshop for young people.

She’s also looking forward to assisting Devarshi in a future 200-hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training: “For me it’s a sense of coming around full circle, and I’m so excited,” she says. “Kripalu is really an amazing community to be a part of, and it really does feel like coming home when I go there.” ■

Note Abby Schwab can be found online at www.abbyschwab.com.

Jessica L. Atcheson is an editor and writer whose work has been published in regional newspapers and online. She currently serves as Associate Editor at Kripalu.