

ARTICLE: Yoga and Wine - Right or Wrong?

Maybe The Question Needs to be Reframed



To drink or not to drink? As I am now in the throws of the holiday season, this topic is again on my mind. What yogis should and should not put into their bodies is a subject of much debate and something we all come across at some point. I personally have gone back and forth between being completely stimulant and substance free, and then woefully mourning the thought of never again experiencing a real Italian espresso, pinot noir, or almond croissant.

Many feel that we must absolutely abstain from alcohol, and they have a point. In small quantities, alcohol has great antioxidant benefits, lowers blood pressure, and supports our good cholesterol or HDL. But even in moderate amounts, alcohol lowers the vibrations of our subtle or astral bodies and therefore hinders us from reaching enlightenment. As practitioners of yoga, we are meant to be moving towards transcendence of the senses, not stuck in them, right?

It seems I have spend years swinging between Macrobiotic and pure gluttony; a searching for some semblance of balance. So a few weeks ago, I attended an event at [Pure](#), which demanded another look at this seemingly great contradiction. Anusara-inspired yoga teacher [Jordan Mallah](#) has teamed up with sommelier [Owen Kotler](#) to create an evening entitled Yoga & Organic Wine; A Divine Pair.

Did I go looking for some – *any* justification of my own love of wine and seemingly incompatible yoga? You bet.

Jordan opened the evening with a chat on passion and possibilities. He said that possibilities open up in following our passions, leading to expansion in our lives and ultimately freedom. Through the gentle, hour long, heart opening class he encouraged us to have fun and enjoy this Friday night yoga party. The point it seemed, was to let the yoga do what it does best; open us up. To our passions, our bodies and, yes, our pallets!

Hearts opened and passions engaged, we were greeted by 7 different organic wines from Oregon and Italy. Owen walked us through each wine, explaining the color, region, and often a personal story about the vineyard owner. I don't know much about wine and having Owen there made the experience come alive. It was a sensory education vs. just a drink on a Friday night.

We were on wine 3 or 4 when the introductions got shorter. Sipping from plastic cups, we had turned Pure's lounge into a little wine bar, and it became increasingly difficult for the experts to talk over us. Smiling to myself, I reflected on the fact that this was surely a different type of Friday night party conversation. Instead of discussing work, relationships and the latest gossip, I was listening to two women talk about their doshas and the success and frustrations of their latest Ayurvedic cleanse. I learned about Kalustyan's, the only place to find yellow mug beans and to-die-for red mustard greens at the Jay street farmers' market.

Jordan's assistant Ashleigh Altman explained a bit about the history of [Anusara](#) and the tantric philosophy from which it stems. Basically the premise of Anusara is to enjoy life and experience bliss and love. And if you find bliss in a bit of chocolate, pastry or red wine then by all means have it. It is about opening our hearts up to all of life's pleasures and experiences, finding our passions, and moving forward with love.

I guess that is the whole point, isn't it? And the real question here is not whether or not you drink, but where are you coming from? It is our core intention in any action that is the most important and, I believe, at the heart of this whole argument. We find yoga through its many limbs and for various reasons. But at the end of the day we all find that it brings us closer to ourselves. Our likes, dislikes, passions, pleasures etc. For some of us that is and needs to be complete abstinence, and for others there is a balance. The truth is that only we can really know that for ourselves. Yoga opens us to not only enjoy these experiences more fully, but to come closer to our own meat-eating alcohol-drinking truths. The paths are many.

Glass of wine in hand, I decided to search the internet to see what others had to say. I came across [Om Shanti](#): A Yoga Blog that made another important point about our intentions. The author, Indiana-based yoga teacher Eugene, suggested that sometimes not drinking can be as much of an attachment. YES! He describes his own experience where not drinking was actually more about the performance of the role of a yogi. "In other words, it is possible for a person to become so attached to a certain self-conception – that he becomes blinded by this, and as a result, conducts all or most of his behaviors to

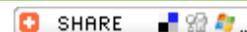
reinforce this self-conception". I agree as we all know at least one of those phony super-sattvic types who ignite guilt and shame in others. I find his honesty refreshing, and it makes me think – who exactly am I trying to please?

Coincidentally, the next day I gave up coffee, gluten and sugar, and swore to remain vegetarian for Thanksgiving after a cute picture of a turkey in the New York Times brought tears to my eyes. But this newfound understanding of moderately enjoying all of life's pleasures makes sense too. And I admit some relief, because the next time I am in Paris blissfully gazing into the patisserie windows, I won't feel so guilty. I hope a time comes in my life when I am quiet enough and too pure to mess with my astral body. Until then? I am passionately seeking balance.

--Alexandra Blatt

ARTICLE: My Highest Mountain

Not Fitting in and Still Trying



A forward: This is one of the hardest things I've ever tried to write. As an artist, I lack words as tools for basic communication. It would be 100 times easier to draw a picture than describe what I am trying to say. My thoughts are often disjointed when I do spill my guts on a page, so bear with me. I'm also going out on a limb and writing this in a public place. I pray that I don't offend those that I mention, I wouldn't be writing this if it wasn't for you guys.

I'll start off by stating the basics. I'm morbidly obese. I weigh over 300 pounds.
- a combination of genetics and poor life decisions. It was always this way, starting in grade school and going all the way through college.. 120, 250, 280 . . . until now, where I top the scales at between 330 and 325. It's been a lifetime of being teased and discriminated against. But here is something else for me to tell you, I do yoga ...and it is one of the hardest things for me to do. But I love it.

When I used to work as a graphic designer for a new age bookstore that had a studio upstairs (you all know the one) some of the staffers encouraged me to try yoga. I cannot begin to tell you the amount of internal scoffing and laughing and self depreciation that went on inside my head each time I heard it. It was with good reason. How could I possibly do yoga? If you are reading this and are "thin" or even mildly overweight, you cannot imagine what it is like to be carrying around about 3 times your normal body weight. Basic things like going up three flights of stairs at Union Square without being winded, or