

Responses to Q&A from screening of the "Uncommon Yogi" – February 2023

Questions listed in alphabetical order by first name

Ana D.P.: this was beautiful. What is the name of the music Krishna released?

Hi Ana,

The title of Krishna's CD is "One Creator."

Christopher R.: Jana, thank you so much for this documentary. It was hugely influential while I was working on my graduate thesis about the relationships between yoga philosophy, civil rights, and the transformation of museums in the fight for social justice. I would love to connect with you directly on the topic.

Broadly speaking, what is your personal perspective on how yoga principles can help us reimagine museums and cultural institutions to make them more welcoming for communities of color that have historically not seen themselves represented in institutional narratives?

Dear Christopher,

I don't have a personal perspective on how yoga principles can help reimagine museums and cultural institutions to make them more welcoming for communities of color. I am sure you are aware of the many museums that are welcoming to Black as well as all people, such as the Studio Museum of Harlem, Reginald Lewis Museum, California African American Museum, National Museum of African American History and Culture, and many, many more. If there are museums that are not welcoming, I don't think yoga can fix that.

DeJa L.(1): How can the broader Stereotypical "Yoga Community" (i.e., Non Black Yoga Teachers) incorporate this documentary to be more inclusive of Black Americans in Yoga, since Yoga (in the West) has been very white, exclusive, and colonized, which deviates from its true history of Yoga?

De DeJa,

The conversation about DEI confuses me and I often don't know where or how to enter it. I can only say that my study and practice of yoga space spans over a half century. I have never felt included or excluded from following my yoga path. I understand that people own studios, businesses, intellectual property, and manage organizations, etc., but they don't have the power to include or exclude me from my practice because it is mine, just as theirs is theirs. Thank you for your thought provoking question.

DeJa L.(2): Such a rich history! I would love to hear more about how we can move beyond Asana and into raising our consciousness, through Yoga, and in classes.

DeJa,

Sankalpa, Sadhana, Svadhyaya! The path has been codified and presented to us. All we have to do is follow the prescription as directed! Blessings.

Eve A.: Thank you Jana! It's always good to see you. I shared your documentary with the students I teach at a community college. How long did it take you to create the documentary?

Hi Eve,

Thanks for joining the online event. Glad you could make it.

I spent a couple of years researching the information I used to develop the script. My first intention was write an article for The Washington Post where I worked, but I had so much information I couldn't figure how to present an angle that would appeal to the newspaper, and I was not ready or inclined to write a book. I decided that telling the story visually would be more appealing for both me and the viewer. I spent an additional six months researching archival photos, creating the original soundtrack, and two months editing the final version.

Marshalla R-I.: Will there be an in-person conference that the BYTA will hold in the upcoming years?

Dear Marshalla,

The BYTA conference has been a biennial event at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health since 2016. But this year, the BYTA board of directors voted to cancel the August 2023 conference. Taking a pause gives us space to strategize and plan for future conferences. Rather than investing time and resources into a single event this year, we believe that our efforts are better spent on creating more online programs, and continuing to develop BYTA's organizational infrastructure to benefit our members throughout the year.

Michelle C.: As a Black Kundalini yoga Teacher how can I get and find Black teachers I/ mentors that provide this lens that decolonizes and liberates my practice and the practice of those I serve?

Dear Michelle,

You must seek them out. I know that sounds obvious. Open your awareness. Look everywhere.

Pamela H.: I am a black yoga teacher having a hard time getting blacks involved in my yoga classes, this is great. How can I increase black participation?

Hi Pamela,

When the student is ready, they will find the teacher. It is not your responsibility to get more people involved, but to be an available presence for those who are ready.

Rebecca M.: So very grateful for your generous spirit and this history. I would love to learn more how to use this information to help reach potential yoga students and create a sense of belonging. Embracing the historical traditions of Black yogis is a wonderful start!

Dear Rebecca,

I am grateful and confident that you will use the information in a positive way and with positive results. Trust your intuition to direct your desire. Practice svadhyaya always.

Reggina T.: Why did you focus on those who did Asana Yoga instead of the philosophy such as Bhakti Tirtha Swami also. Would the documentary have been too broad and long?

Hi Reggina,

Hatha yoga as the expression and definition of yoga is popular and serves as the introduction to yoga for the majority of people in the U.S. Hatha is a gateway to other expressions, -- bhakti, Karma, jnana -- by introducing the practice and discipline of yoga through the body. Yoga as a practice for self development is still in its infancy in the Western culture. It's important to meet people where they are.

Sarah G.: This was so wonderful and inspiring. I would love a version of this that I could show to elementary aged students to improve interest in practicing. I'm a white woman teaching in a predominantly black school. I really want to show my students that yoga is something that is theirs to claim for themselves and not just a "skinny white lady" activity. Do you know of any resources for that or is there a possibility that there is a video in the works for this? Thank you!

Dear Sarah,

I understand that information should be age appropriate for children. I have grandchildren in elementary and middle school who have watched the video and they seem to understand the content as well as they process most of what they see on TV or movies. In my opinion the video is appropriate for Black children 8-years and older, and like the "Wizard of Oz," they should watch it annually as they matriculate.

Talaya S.: This is so awesome. I'm also an African American RYT and I love the history of yoga. How can I find experiences abroad to further my study in yoga and yoga therapy?

Dear Taleya,

I went to Ghana West Africa with a group of Black yoga teachers led by Krishna Kaur as the first step towards becoming a yoga teacher. There was no certificate nor continuing education units; instead I had a profoundly deep learning experience and understanding that was the foundation for who I am as a yoga teacher. Seek and you will find!

Tamara A.: That was beautiful, thank you for sharing. What's your take on Kemetic yoga which was practiced by ancient Egyptians and north Africans and how it influenced yoga's history?

Hi Tamara,

I have no doubt that the ancient people of Kemet had healing practices and rituals. There is historical and archaeological evidence that supports this, but yoga as a philosophy and practice as codified by Patanjali has its roots in Vedic culture. So it is written!

Teri R.: Yes, please have Jana speak to the concerns of us black teachers in predominantly white communities and white teachers teaching in black schools each attempting to raise numbers/interest/awareness of black practitioners?

Dear Teri,

I cannot speak to the concerns of Black teachers in predominantly white communities nor white teachers in Black schools because I am not knowledgeable about their concerns nor do I have any direct or indirect experience with teachers in the situations you raise.