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One of Us MyLinda Ann Morales-Hutchings

Her students' journey is one of self-discovery

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TAVARES

Body, mind and spirit equal yoga.

For MyLinda Ann Morales-Hutchings, an experienced yoga teacher registered with Yoga Alliance, the phrase is more than mere words. The concept is necessary if one is to practice and hone skills to master the art.

"When you do a pose or a sequence, where you're flowing into three different postures, your brain has to figure out new pathways on how to access the muscles that way. In that way your body and mind get a workout.

"When you leave the spiritual part of it out, it's gymnastics or aerobics -- those are fine, but it's not yoga anymore."

Morales-Hutchings, 42, mainly practices her own style, Power Alignment Yoga, which she trademarked in 2004.

"I practice yoga at least every day once," she said, "if I have time, twice, and if I can get another one in, three times. That's a good day."

Power Alignment Yoga is a cross between Iyengar and power yoga. In power yoga, instructors don't stop to explain alignment, Morales-Hutchings said. She does. In each of her classes, she works on a yoga theme, i.e., Ahimsa is Sanskrit for non-harming, nonviolence.

Ahimsa, Morales-Hutchings said, is practiced to do no harm to the body: moving and holding poses strong enough and long enough for each person's muscles to strengthen, stretch and lengthen, yet not pushing so hard that it injures. It also engages the mind and emotions to stretch enough to grow, evolve and stay healthy, but not by competing or causing pain to oneself or others.

"Yoga is not about getting somewhere. It's not about the end product -- an advanced pose or touching our toe, for example," she said.



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"Yoga is about our journey of self-discovery, about finding our internal power and positively expressing our power to enhance our lives and the lives of others."

Morales-Hutchings spends most of the week traveling Central Florida. She teaches on Wednesdays at the RDV Sportsplex in Maitland, and on Thursdays at the National Training Center in Clermont and Gold's Gym in Mount Dora. In all, she has about 100 students.

On Tuesdays she heads to New Smyrna Beach to observe and then take a teacher training course, and on Fridays she teaches what she has learned earlier in the week to students in Flagler Beach.

"I see students get strong. I see them become more confident. The two go together. In Power Alignment Yoga, your body gets strong real quick. For me, teaching is like a calling."

Beginning Jan. 21, she will teach beginner and intermediate Power Alignment Yoga classes from 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. and from 6:30 to 8 p.m., respectively, at the Eustis Community Building, 601 Northshore Drive. There is no cost, but Morales-Hutchings suggests a \$10 donation.

Morales-Hutchings opened Charlotte Yoga in North Carolina with her sister, Grace, in 1999. They had two thriving studios but recently cut back to one when Morales-Hutchings' plans changed.

When she and her husband, Paul, came to Lake County in 2000, the plan was to make it a retirement area. She would go back to Charlotte for a couple of weeks each month to keep up with administration of the business.

"It was supposed to be like a vacation place," she said, "a nice, quiet life."

Morales-Hutchings, who worked in the fitness field since high school graduation in 1983, began practicing yoga in 1994 when she developed debilitating muscle spasms in her lower back, a genetic condition. She couldn't walk for a week or work for a month.

She went to a chiropractor and, to work around the pain, learned exercises and stretches that included yoga. She signed up for classes.

After three months of yoga, Morales-Hutchings was able to get out of bed without a struggle.

"It was so gradual," she said, "I didn't even notice."

A year later, she was able to touch her toes, a feat she said was difficult because she was "not naturally flexible. Every inch of flexibility I have, I have had to work hard for."

In her spare time, Morales-Hutchings writes about yoga for various publications.

"Everything is yoga," she said. "I practice yoga. I read about yoga. I go to yoga workshops."

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