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by Jennifer Lang

Recently, I was faced with a choice: to teach or cancel my Sunday-morning [yoga](#) class? To attend my once-a-week vinyasa class later in the day or forgo it? My 14-year-old daughter was in the hospital, scheduled for reconstructive foot surgery sometime that day. Shouldn't I be by her bedside?

My husband and I had divvied up her 48-hour inpatient stay, him taking the first 24, starting with her Saturday-night check-in, and me the latter, covering post-op and checkout. But it left me turning over a question that unnerved me: Is practicing—even teaching—yoga selfish?

Not long ago, I read a piece on how to reduce stress that suggested [yoga](#), because it helps you focus on you—your breath, your body, your thoughts. Framing yoga in this way—as a practice that's all about me—made me uncomfortable. Me turning inward, me tuning into my needs and tuning out my family's needs. Me being hyper-aware of my body's every move, its strengths and weaknesses. Me cultivating awareness of my mind.

Back in 1995, when I first delved into the practice, I was lucky to attend class once a week. My son was two, I worked part-time, and the work-family juggle had officially begun. Then my family grew, as did my needs. With three little kids under the age of six, I needed an outlet. Time out to be someone other than Mommy. To release tension, both physical and emotional. My 90 minutes on the mat served as such. When my stress level rose, my mantra became "I need yoga."

Throughout the years, as my kids got older, I came to understand that, in order to be a better mom, I needed to take care of myself and fill myself up first to avoid running on empty. After all, what good would I do them if I was constantly in a bad mood, full of negative energy, sleep-deprived and depleted?

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we enroll in a demanding teacher training certification program that requires us to practice daily, assist often, observe occasionally, read, write, study, and take exams? Over the years, as yoga became more and more integral in my life, I felt every one of those pulls. Was I being selfish? Once, years ago, as I was halfway out the door to class, one of my kids asked if I loved yoga more than I loved them.

These questions plagued me as my daughter's surgery date approached. I discussed it with my husband, who agreed that, because I run a small studio and had to cancel classes in both March and in April due to traveling, it would be best not to cancel any additional classes. I reasoned with myself that if I attended the vigorous Sunday class (as a student), it might help me sleep better that night in the hospital, in a recliner by her bedside. The explanations and solutions were soundproof, logical.

Still tormented, I discussed it with one of my yoga teacher friends. She insisted that regardless of our outlet—whether judo, jewelry-making, or training for a triathlon—we all have tendencies to become consumed. Any passion that is pursued seriously can be perceived as selfish. There is a fine line, but not one I should worry about, she reassured me.

So why then, on the morning of her surgery, was I faltering as I sat in front of my students? Teary while chanting om? Unable to focus on my sequencing? The words—and the true meaning behind them—in that article about yoga as a stress reducer were giving me second thoughts about the role the practice plays in my life.

The surgery was scheduled for midday and my husband told me there was no reason for me to come until afterward. So I attended my vinyasa class to take my mind off what I couldn't control. I put my phone on mute, as always; midway through class, I retrieved it and went outside. Two missed calls from him. I phoned. The procedure was already over, and he was waiting for her in the recovery room. He recommended I hold off coming until later.

I went back to class. We did handstands and drop-backs. I sweated and twisted and released toxins. I tried to focus on my breath and quiet my mind. To let go of all that I cannot control.

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overnight bag. As much as I hated to miss the Yoga for a Healthy Back certification program I've been attending every Monday for the past few months, I knew there was a limit to how much I could prioritize that practice. It was my daughter's turn. Time for me to be at her side, to help her get dressed and learn how to balance on one foot as she brushed her teeth. I was full up, calm inside, and ready.

*Jennifer Lang is a freelance writer and certified yoga instructor in Raanana, Israel. She blogs about living in a country she never dreamed of calling home at [opentoisrael.com](http://opentoisrael.com).*

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