

What is a Great Teacher?

Being a good teacher is not about doing the perfect, most difficult asanas. It is about having good energy, being passionate and sharing what you know with others.

A great teacher continuously acquires knowledge, is authentic and of service to others.

Character, patience, love for your own home practice and teaching others is an important part of being a great teacher. This experience will help you teach from an intuitive place where you invite students to explore their own authentic self. Yoga is ultimately about coming back to the inner self, and a great teacher has the ability to help students on their journey back home [to their inner selves].

Being Present in the Moment

Tuning into students' needs in the moment and being flexible with regard to changing any previously planned yoga lesson plan is another big factor. It demonstrates not only your intuition but also your ability to listen and care about your students.

Voice

The tone and tempo of your voice is also very important. Is it clear, calm, and concise? Students in yoga classes want to relax and de stress. After a hard day of work, the last thing they want to hear is a drill sergeant's voice, or a voice they can hardly hear, or one that has a high squeak.

It is a very stressful world out there, and many students just want time to relax. That's not to say that relaxation is the only objective. In fact, a magnetic voice can inspire a student to release further into a posture, and an energetic voice brings energy into the affirmation and posture that students can draw on. But relaxation does need to be present in some form.

In Savasana (the final resting posture) especially, students' ability to relax is often inspired by the tone of the teacher's voice.

Pace

The pace of the class also needs to be optimized for the group you are teaching. If it's too slow, they go to sleep. If it's too fast, it's not possible for them to go inward. Are the yoga instructions for beginner's classes slow, clear, and easy to understand? Are you talking too much (especially during classes with intermediate students)? All of this is important to think about.

Assisting Students with Adjustments

Sometimes even the smallest modification to a student's position in an asana will make a huge difference in his or her experience of energy. Just because a student is doing well in a posture does not mean he or she won't benefit from your help.

There are always opportunities even with flexible students to help them to have deeper experiences. Assisting students is a great way to inspire them to open, expand and release tension. The quickest way to get students to leave your classes is to never help them — they might as well buy a yoga video instead.

Come Early, Stay Late

Great teachers always come early to class — not only to meditate beforehand, but so they can talk to each student to ascertain his or her present condition or if there are any postures in particular that they would like to explore in the class. In addition, a friendly greeting is always welcomed and helps to keep the class relaxed.

During this time — and even during the class connecting with students beforehand is important. It's also useful to ask the right questions of your students. Please remind students if anyone has any injuries. Asking students about injuries not only shows that you care for them, but they also know that you have the level of expertise to keep them safe.

If you know enough information you can show the right modifications to make the postures more enjoyable and beneficial. Also if there is an injury that needs a doctor's attention you can suggest that they consult one. People who are uncomfortable in a posture will not always tell you they are uncomfortable. By being alert, caring, and creative you can always find ways to modify asanas for these students.

It's also great to hang around after class to talk to students rather than rushing off. Some of the most meaningful conversations have been after class. Always allow time to chat with students, not just as yoga students, but as a friend.

Be open to demonstrate postures or answer deeper spiritual questions after a class. Feel free to visit with any students who seem to have had problems with certain postures as it may be an injury that you are not aware of and can offer some assistance.

Energy, Focus, and Intuition

Teaching a great yoga class takes all the energy, focus and intuitive insight that we can muster. Draw upon your spiritual gurus and the ascended masters for guidance as they are closer than you may think. Be awake and ready. The ultimate goal of yoga is union with the higher self.

How might you help each student go inward? Any student who even slightly touches his or her true Self will see a dramatic life change.

Keep inspired, passionate and keep on learning. Yoga is a lifelong practice of both student and teacher all in the same breath. Try your best to make each and every class as great as you can. It is incredible to watch the teachings of the art and science of yoga transform the lives of others in such an incredibly positive manner.

Teaching takes practice and self, daily home -practice...

GUIDELINES FOR THE PRACTITIONER There are some important notes for yoga practitioners

Awareness: This is very important for the Yoga practice. Awareness is the key words for Yoga. If no awareness, it will be simple exercise. The purpose of asana practice is to influence, integrate and harmonize all the levels of being: physical, pranic, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. The following awareness must be present, while practitioners practicing: 1. Movement awareness 2. Breathing awareness 3. Counting awareness 4. Effect awareness. 5. Mental reaction awareness.

Breathing: Nostril breathing is one of the important points in Yoga. Always breathe through the nose unless specific instructions are given to the contrary. Try to synchronized movement and breathing together. So be aware of the breath always.

Relaxation: If you feel tired or exhausted one must relax. Relaxation is important during practice because the practitioner should experience the effect of practice at different level. Shavasana should be performed after Asana and Pranayama.

Counter-pose: Asana doesn't affect only the body but it affect the mind too. Counter pose is important in asana for balance. IF they practice forward bending then backward bending is required.

Contra-indications: This is very important points for all practitioners. People suffering from chronic ailments and diseases should consult a doctor or competent Yoga teacher before starting Yoga asanas. People must know the contra-indication of the practices beforehand. You Can Practice Yoga Poses and Breathing Exercises in Adapted Forms If Under the Following Conditions:

Pregnancy The special attention is paid to pranayama, relaxation exercises for the whole body (especially the muscles of the abdomen and uterus), and joint exercises. The routine is based on the trimester, and is generally very soft. Many asanas are helpful during pregnancy, but it is important to check with a midwife/doctor/competent yoga teacher prior to practicing. Do not strain. Do not use inverted asanas and twists in the later stages of pregnancy.

Menstruating The practice should be more lenient; take care in twists, backbends, power asanas, headstand and inversions. But if you feel unwell, abandon the practice completely!

Hypertension If you want to do inversions, do them only under the guidance of an experienced yoga teacher.

Vegetative-vascular dystonia The morning routine is recommended that include standing poses and inversions.

Spine diseases including Osteochondrosis, scoliosis, etc. Avoid postures with forward bends from standing or sitting position.

Arthritis and arthrosis Only therapeutic yoga is advised

Neuroses and chronic fatigue syndrome Do mild asanas, focusing on deep relaxation, as well as the breathing exercises.

Time of practice: Asanas may be practiced at any time of day with empty stomach. The best time is the bham muhurta, two hours before and including sunrise.

Place of practice: Yoga practice may be practiced at any place but place must be well-ventilated, calm and quiet. Asanas may also be practiced outdoors, but the surroundings should be pleasant, a beautiful garden with trees and flowers. Do not practice in a strong wind, in the cold, in air that is dirty, smoky. Place should be neat and clean. If balancing asanas, check your surroundings. Table, chair or other things should not be harm you, in case of imbalance.

Asanas may be practiced by any age groups above 6 years.

Clothes: While practicing Asana or other Yoga practices, wear loose, light and comfortable clothing. Avoid spectacles, wrist watches and any jewelry. Better remove before practice. Mat/Blanket: Use a folded blanket of natural material for the practices as this will act as an insulator between the body and the earth. Do not use mattress which is spongy or filled with air as this does not give sufficient support to the spine.

Take a shower before practice.

Emptying the bowels: Before commencing the asana program, the bladder and intestines should be empty. If constipation, try to practice Sankhaprakshalana, which will release constipation. Empty bowl is important for prana concept. Proper flow of prana, empty bowl is necessary. Empty stomach: The stomach should be empty while practicing yoga. Yoga Practices can be done any time with empty stomach but after having the food three- four hours. Do not strain: Don't strain your body during practice. Try to relax the whole body. Diet: There are no special dietary rules for asana practitioners, although it is better to eat natural food and a vegetarian diet. At meal times it is advised to half fill the stomach with food, one quarter with water and leave the remaining quarter empty. Eat only to satisfy hunger and not too much that a feeling of heaviness or laziness occurs. Eat to live rather than live to eat.

Termination of asana: If there is excessive pain in any part of the body, the asana should be terminated immediately and, if necessary, medical advice sought. Do not stay in an asana if discomfort is felt

The art and science of yoga sequencing for beginners: How the order of poses can change the effect of the practice

In the beginning of your class, choose breathing warm-up exercises such as Ujjayi that allow your class some space to move dynamically and breathe.

I remember hating Latin in college. Unfortunately, it was required for my degree, so I had to endure. For example, translating a Latin sentence takes a lot of work because there is quite a bit of flexibility in word placement; it was hard to know if “Claudius stabbed Dionysus” or the other way around. So you had to pay attention to grammatical nuance to figure out what was going on.

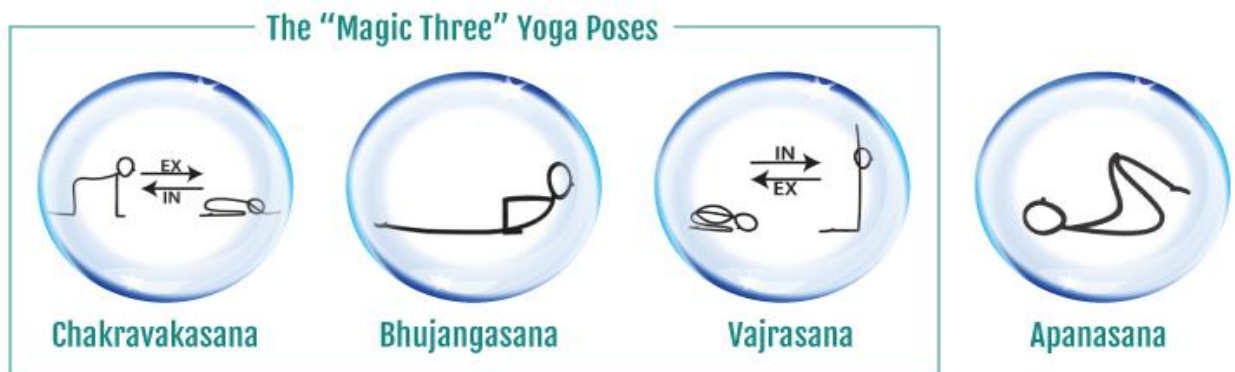
Yoga sequencing is similar to Latin in some ways. Here, too, you have many different elements (poses, breathing practices, etc.) that could be arranged with great flexibility and produce an entirely different result. Therefore, being a yoga teacher is not only about knowing how to do the pose, but also where to place it in relation to other poses to produce the desired effect and minimize the risk.

There is an art and science to yoga sequencing. When we think of science, we think logic. It is something that can be rationally explained and something that is systematically organized. The “science of yoga sequencing” refers to the body of knowledge generated over hundreds of years and strategies for arranging various yogic tools into a logical potent practice. These principles and guidelines on HOW to select appropriate practices and WHY to combine them in a certain way are clearly articulated in the Krishnamacharya/Desikachar teaching lineage.

Any practice design must begin with analysis of **WHO, WHY, WHERE and then WHAT and HOW**

- WHO is the practitioner and his/her specific needs, goals and preferences – STUDENT

- WHY are you teaching this practice, what are you trying to accomplish – INTENTION
- WHERE will the practice take place and when – CONTEXT
- WHAT are you planning to teach – CONTENT
- HOW do you present it to your students – METHOD
 - *“The teacher who is learned, reflective and disciplined should apply yoga appropriately, only after considering the time, place, age, activity and strength of the student” – Yoga Rahasya of Nathamuni 1:30*
- Let’s use some simple examples. There is a group of three poses that I love, I call them [“the magic three”](#). They are magic because almost anybody can do them and most beginner students would benefit from them.



Let’s use those three poses (Chakravakasana, Bhujangasana, Vajrasana) plus Apanasana to show how we can adapt their form and rearrange them within a sequence to achieve completely different results. For that we will use 3 hypohetic clients that are loosely based on some of my former clients.

Meet Jill. She is in her 40s, works from home and spends a lot of time in front of her computer. She also takes care of her sick mother, so she doesn’t have much time to go to yoga classes. She needs a short routine to do on her own. She is worried about sitting too much during the day and feels stiffness in her hips and back when she gets up. She also experiences

an afternoon energy “slump”, where she has hard time focusing on her tasks and feels lethargic.

Here are some suggestions that we can give Jill:

- Alternate sitting and standing at the desk
- Take short frequent walking breaks (at least every hour)
- Integrate deep breathing while she walks
- Try the following short yoga practice to do around 2.30pm, right around the time her afternoon slump is about to hit.

Yoga practice for an “afternoon slump”			
1.		<p>Repeat 4x deepening the breath to IN/EX 6 sec.</p>	<p>Chakravakasana. To warm up the hips and back, to deepen the breath.</p>
2.		<p>A. Repeat 4x B. Hold 4 breaths C. Hold 4 breaths with progressive abdominal contraction. Rest in Child's pose, then repeat on the other side. (Deepen the breath to IN/EX 8 sec while in the Child's pose expanding your upper/middle back)</p>	<p>Chakravakasana adaptations. A. To loosen up the back, hips flexors and glutes. B. To contract the hip flexors. C. To engage the glutes and stretch the hip flexors. To engage the core and focus the mind.</p>
3.		<p>A. Repeat 4x alternating sides B. Stay for 4 breaths, lifting the leg a bit higher with each inhalation. IN 6 sec, pause for 2 sec, exhale 6 sec.</p>	<p>Salabhasana. To warm up the neck, to strengthen the back, to engage the glutes and stretch the hip flexors, to produce an uplifting effect on the system.</p>
4.		<p>4 cycles alternation sides. Keep IN/EX 8 sec.</p>	<p>Vajrasana. To increase circulation to the neck and upper back, to stretch the lower back, to compensate for #3, to produce an uplifting effect on the system.</p>
5.		<p>Krama Inhalation. Inhale 1/2 of the way for 4 sec - pause - then finish inhaling for 4 sec - pause - then exhale for 8 sec. Repeat for 12 cycles.</p>	<p>Any seated position. To deepen the breath and to produce an uplifting effect on the system.</p>

Here is Anna. She is a new mom to a 6 month old son; she is always on the go from one thing to the next, often with the baby on her hip. She worries about his health and safety to the point that she sometimes feels shortness of breath. She has anxious energy around her and she feels that she can only spare a few minutes of yoga before she goes to bed. She is exhausted by the end of the day, but has trouble sleeping because she keeps listening for the sounds from the baby's room.

For Anna we would have the following recommendations:

- To take more time for herself, get out more without the baby
- To get a support system in place – friends, family or other moms
- To do deep breathing while she breastfeeds (tying the breathing practice to a specific activity)
- To try this short practice before bed paying specific attention to the breath

Yoga practice for better sleep

1.		4 cycles. Gradually deepen IN/EX to 6 sec.	Vajrasana. To match her current energy level, to deepen the breath, to begin turning attention inward.
2.		<p>A. On the exhale turn toward the right hip, pulling it in toward the shoulder. Repeat 4x, alternating sides.</p> <p>B. Stretch each side for 4-6 breaths with progressive abdominal contraction. Maintain the length of the breath.</p>	<p>Chakravakasana /Vajrasana adaptations.</p> <p>A. To contract the sides of the torso.</p> <p>B. To stretch the sides of the body, especially the QL and hip flexors (they get tight from carrying a baby on the hip) and facilitate better breathing.</p>
3.		A. Repeat 4x alternating sides; try to keep IN/EX 6 sec. B. Stay for 4 breaths; try to keep IN/EX 6 sec.	Salabhasana/Bhujangasana. A. To warm up the neck, to strengthen the back, to lengthen the sides of the torso, to deepen the breath. B. To stabilize the lower back and sacrum.
4.		Repeat 4x lengthening the exhalation to 8 sec. While staying in the Child's pose, repeat mentally with each exhalation: "Let go, let go, let go..."	Chakravakasana. To stretch the back, to compensate for #3, to deepen the exhalation, to unwind.
5.		Repeat 4x lengthening the exhalation to 8 sec. While staying in the pose, repeat mentally with each exhalation: "Let go, let go, let go..."	Apanasana. To stretch the back, to deepen the exhalation, to unwind.
6.		Keep the exhalation long. Every time you exhale repeat mentally: "Let go, let go, let go..." Stay for 5 minutes.	Any comfortable resting position. To relax the body, to unwind, to prepare for restful sleep.



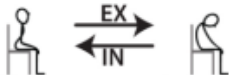
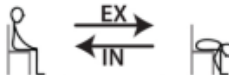


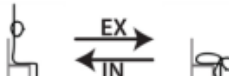


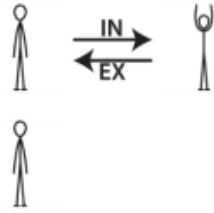
Jim is a construction worker who spends most of his day on his feet doing physical labor – lifting, leaning and hauling heavy things. He got into a habit of popping a couple of Advil every morning because his lower back

and his knees feel so stiff. He doesn't want to be dependent on the meds though and is looking for other ways to "limber up" in the morning. His morning energy isn't great either, it takes him a while to get going.

For Jim we would recommend that he

- Pays attention to proper lifting technique while at work
- Goes to bed earlier to get more rest (if this is not enough, we would need to explore other options to help him sleep better)
- Starts his day with the following short practice while still in bed as soon as he wakes up, and then gradually transitions to sitting in bed, and then to the ground.

Yoga practice for stiff knees and back

1.	<p>A. </p> <p>B. </p>	<p>A. Repeat 4x, gradually deepening the breath.</p> <p>B. Repeat 6x, alternating sides. Focus on engaging the quads instead of straightening the leg.</p>	<p>Apanasana. To warm up the back and knees. To deepen the breath, to gently wake up the body.</p>
2.	<p>A. </p> <p>B. </p>	<p>A. Repeat 4x IN/EX 6 sec.</p> <p>B. Repeat 4x going only as far down as it is comfortable.</p>	<p>Chakravakasana sitting in bed. To warm up the back, to deepen the breath.</p>
3.	<p>A. </p> <p>B. </p>	<p>A. Repeat 4x alternating the turning of the head.</p> <p>B. Add bending of the knee. Repeat 4 x on each side. Inhale 6 sec - pause for 2 sec - exhale 6 sec.</p>	<p>Bhujangasana. To warm up the neck, to strengthen the back, to engage the hamstrings, to warm up the knees, to stretch the hip flexors, to produce an uplifting effect on the system.</p>
4.	<p>A. </p> <p>B. </p> <p>C. </p>	<p>A. Repeat 4x, big arm sweeps. IN/EX 8 sec.</p> <p>B. A. Repeat 4x on each side without leaning back.</p> <p>C. Stay for 4 breaths</p>	<p>Vajrasana sitting in bed (or chair) A. To warm up the back, to deepen the breath, to produce an uplifting effect on the system. B. To engage the quads (for knee support), to warm up the knees. C. To stretch the back.</p>
5.	<p> Stay</p>	<p>A. Repeat 4x, IN/EX 8 sec</p> <p>B. Inhale 8 sec - Pause 2 sec - Exhale 8 sec. /8 cycles</p>	<p>Any standing position. To deepen the breath, to produce an uplifting effect on the system.</p>

As you can see, each practice is meant for the needs of an individual student, taking into consideration who she is, why she needs yoga, when and where she would be able to practice and what would work for her. And even the practices made of the same four poses can be adapted to

meet the needs of three very different students, if we choose appropriate pose adaptations, arrange them according to the student's needs and use relevant breathing practices.

“A well-conceived sequence is the key to an effective practice. Such a sequence has the qualities of order, harmony, and efficiency throughout, each posture and adaptation being selected and placed purposefully to create an integrated whole.” – **Gary Kraftsow**
“Yoga for Wellness”

The *science* of yoga sequencing refers to specific guidelines on yoga practice design, while *art* implies “the use of skill and imagination”. The art of yoga sequencing is built on the inspiration and creativity of the teacher; it uses subtle details to breathe life into the practice; it includes the teacher's ability to make the practice relevant to the student and help her discover something new about herself. The art of sequencing comes from the clear receptive mind of the teacher and grows with experience. Therefore, a skillful sequence is not just a logically arranged set of yoga poses, but a practice that has a positive impact on a practitioner, whether it's physical, physiological or mental-emotional.

Both our theoretical understanding and creative skills are essential in yoga practice design and take time to develop. If you study the teachings and apply those principles in your personal yoga practice and in your work with the students, you will notice that your practices are becoming more refined, harmonious and relevant.

In my school years I eventually became fascinated with Latin. I came to view it as an intricate puzzle that, once solved, would reveal inner depth, complexity and elegance that I haven't seen before. Your yoga practices have the potential to do the same.

Tune in on Friday as we feature a case study of a specific student who had a very complicated health history. You will see how we approached his challenges in a meaningful way and created a relevant practice for him.

More Sequencing ideas:

<http://sequencewiz.org/2015/07/29/the-art-and-science-of-yoga-sequencing/>

Creating Space for Transformation

Yoga teachers in particular would benefit from starting to think more systematically about how best to support students' psychological and emotional safety. Of course, absolute safety – whether physical, psychological, or emotional – can never be guaranteed. Nonetheless, it's the responsibility of the teacher to maintain the safest environment that he or she can. Notably, this doesn't mean that classes shouldn't be challenging. It's not a matter of lightening up or dumbing down. On the contrary, the goal is to create the conditions that empower students to dive deeply into their practice – mind, body, and spirit.

Value your students' emotional, psychological and spiritual benefits as much as its physical ones.

Reflecting on 30 years of teaching, Judith Hanson Lasater concluded that **the most important work of a yoga teacher is to transform her class into a “sacred circle”: that is, “a safe place for the personal exploration of one’s body, emotions and mind.”**

“No teacher is a good teacher if he/she does not create this sacred circle in which every student feels valued, respected and completely safe. This means that the class is free from verbal, emotional, physical and sexual coercion or abuse. The first duty of a yoga teacher is to create this safe place. Without this intrinsic sense of safety, it is impossible for the student to let go and allow the practice to unfold.”

Although the average student starts studying yoga in search of nothing more than stretching and stress relief, a good class provides the opportunity to go deeper. Students who are ready and willing to do so should be supported in the process of shifting out of an everyday state of mind and into one that enables internal exploration, learning, and growth. If teachers are to lead this process responsibly, they must develop the

ability to create an environment that maximizes students' psychological and emotional safety.

In the book, *Yoga Ph.D.*, it states that, "it's important to recognize that the yoga teacher-student relationship is inherently fraught with interpersonal issues not dissimilar to those of the therapist-client"

This isn't to suggest that yoga teachers are equivalent to therapists: obviously, they're not. There is a parallelism there, however, in that strong emotional and psychological experiences, which tap into deep personal issues buried in the subconscious mind, are not uncommon in the yoga classroom. Consequently, there's a pronounced tendency for students who have such experiences to unwittingly project strong feelings onto their teachers . . . This kind of projection puts the teacher up on a pedestal where she's no longer perceived to be an ordinary person. Rather, she's imagined as someone imbued with a mystical ability to evoke powerful states in her students. This misattribution is potentially damaging. And this is particularly true in cases where the teacher feeds off such adulation and (without necessarily realizing what she's doing) works to reinforce or even demand it.

In order to maximize psychological and emotional safety, yoga teachers must be grounded enough to withstand the seductive force of strong student projections. Ideally, they should be able to hold a safe space for students to work through their projections, while encouraging them to progressively reclaim the power of their experience for themselves. And, even when projections are not present, it can be difficult to know how to work with unexpectedly powerful emotional releases that regularly occur in yoga classes. Developing the tools necessary to work with these dynamics is every bit as important as learning enough about anatomy to prevent physical injuries.

Finally, yoga is often used as a means of escaping the pressures of everyday life. This may take the form of spiritual bypassing, which chases

blissed out states of consciousness as a means of avoiding such pedestrian demands as work, family, and relationships. Alternatively, students may fantasize about achieving the iconic “yoga body,” which has been aggressively marketed as a symbol of perfect health, beauty, serenity, achievement, and self-control. Either way, thinking into the psychological and emotional dynamics in play would burst the bubble. As a result, it’s avoided.

At the same time, teachers need to engage in ongoing self-study to become more intimate with their own psychological and emotional patterning, and learn to work with it as best they can.

It’s important to recognize that anxiety, depression, and other psychological and emotional problems are rampant today. An estimated 26.2 percent of American adults, or 57.7 million people, suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder annually. Add in the undiagnosed problems caused by skyrocketing stress, and it’s evident that **grappling with challenging psychological and emotional issues is the new normal.**

Yoga teachers should be proud of the fact that they’re working to create a sacred space that not only offers students refuge from these pressures, but tools for emotional and psychological renewal as well. Teaching yoga is invaluable work that can transform and even save lives. Doing it responsibly, however, requires maintaining psychological and emotional safety. This is not necessarily easy. Learning to do it effectively requires at least as much targeted study, training, and concern as the much more commonly recognized goal of preventing physical injuries.

Self reflection/discussion questions:

Will you teach everyone or refuse some students?

When do you recommend students to see a professional doctor or psychologist?

How will you handle an emotional outburst from a student during the class?

How do you handle a negative, critical student whom is disrupting others?

If you are experiencing trauma will you still teach a class?

How do you deal with an emotional release of your own in class will you contain your self or share your emotions with your students?

Carol Horton, Ph.D

<http://www.90monkeys.com/2013/08/holding-the-sacred-circle-yoga-teachers-and-emotional-safety-part-1/>