



Take your seat in style and discover how what you wear affects how you feel and how others feel about you.

By Sara Avant Stover



Whether you buy your yoga wardrobe from WalMart or Lululemon, you can find just the right fashions to suit your size, budget, and mood. As a student, you might search for styles that show off your body or personality, but, as a teacher, there's more to consider. When you step into the seat of the teacher you become a role model. Then what you wear has a greater impact not only on how you feel but also on how others feel, too. The task is to dress in a way that uplifts your words, actions, and spirit in service to your students and your subject matter.

How can what you wear help you embody your teachings? How can you use all of who you are, inside and out, to inspire your students?

## Appearance Matters

Like it or not, what you wear matters. We all know that when we look good, we feel good; and when we feel good, those around us can feel that, too.

"Our physical and subtle bodies can sense so much more than we understand intellectually," says Hari Kaur Khalsa, a Kundalini Yoga teacher, author, and director of education and training at Golden Bridge Yoga NYC.

"Understanding the impact of our actions and presentation is the path of the yogi," she adds. Therefore Khalsa puts a lot of attention into what she wears as a teacher, and she feels grateful that Kundalini founder Yogi Bhasan challenged her to link spirituality with fashion.

As a result, she says, "I have seen the power that sacred fashion has to uplift people both in yoga classes and on the street."

## What to Wear?

When choosing what to wear, consider what colors, styles, and fabrics are

comfortable, practical, and uplifting for you and your students. Dress with the remembrance that you are a role model for your students.

"Yoga teachers would be wise to be dressed in a way that looks professional: clean, neat, and modest," advises Desiree Rumbaugh, a senior certified Anusara Yoga teacher. "After that, creativity and beauty would definitely enhance the body of the one who is taking the seat of the teacher with Grace."

Grace can have many different looks and faces. When you step into Grace, you embrace infinite possibility and the courage to radically accept and present yourself, as you are, which is always a divinely unique being.

"Grace can be cutting edge!" Khalsa exclaims. "It is the coolest and most sought-after quality in the subconscious."

Living in New York City, she practices what she preaches and enjoys dressing in a way that is creative and surprising. As a result, Khalsa is constantly stopped, photographed, questioned, and complimented because of her attire.

Recently when Khalsa had exited a movie theater and was waiting to cross the street, a woman beside her leaned over and whispered in a thick Brooklyn accent, "I don't know what this is about, but whatever it is, I love it and so does my husband!"

Khalsa was wearing a white turban, a white silk kurta (long, flowing shirt), a dupata (scarf), jeans, and boots.

Adrian Cox, a vinyasa teacher and owner of Yoga Elements in Bangkok, Thailand, has only recently started to consider the correlation between his wardrobe and his teaching. "I've discovered rather late that fashion in yoga is part of the image I project as a teacher," he says. "Especially here in Asia, appearances are super-important."

Cox now puts more thought into what he wears when he teaches. He opts for cleanliness, modesty, and simplicity by dressing in a standard uniform of white sweat pants and a T-shirt when teaching.

## **Maintain Modesty**

Even when you get bold with your attire, always choose clothing that exudes respect for your students and the teachings.

"Teachers are not meant to wear tight and sexy clothing," says Anna Getty, a Los Angeles-based Kundalini Yoga teacher (and former fashionista) who specializes in pre- and postnatal yoga.

"We are supposed to wear clothing that is loose fitting, comfortable, clean, and uplifting."

In her prenatal classes, Getty makes sure that the mothers-to-be feel comfortable. She opts to wear something light and feminine, such as white cotton pants and a pink Indian-inspired shirt.

"There have been a few times in the past when I have worn yoga clothes that may have been a little too sexy for a prenatal class," she recalls. "I could feel that some of the moms were uncomfortable."

"I see how I made the class more about me than about them," she says.

## Choosing Your Colors

The colors that you wear should also reflect modesty and enhance the greatness of your teachings and your own spirit.

Yogi Bhajan taught, "A teacher should look like a sage and a prince or princess of peace and divinity." To achieve this, he recommended that teachers wear white or cream in cotton or natural fabric. White, he said, represents light and magnifies one's aura ten times, while natural fabrics benefit your psyche, energy, and nervous system.

If you wish to be more colorful, play with letting your clothing reflect your inner state and that which you wish to create in your class.

Twee Merrigan, a Prana Flow teacher, turns to *rasa*, or color therapy, which teaches that earth tones are grounding, blues and whites are cooling, and reds are invigorating.

Whether you choose to dress in white or in color, consider the impact that your purchases have on the environment and on others. Clothing made of natural fibers, like organic cotton and bamboo, not only feel better on your skin but also make a positive impact on the environment. As a role model to your students, what you wear can inspire others to live and dress more consciously.

Merrigan extends *ahimsa* (nonharming) to her wardrobe by opting to shop from fair-trade clothing companies.

"I prefer to support smaller businesses that are more globally conscious of how their actions can positively affect peace," she asserts.

## The Pitfall of Narcissism

For men and women alike, opt for simplicity. Remember, you want your students to focus on the teachings, not your outfit.

Also, when you put too much emphasis on your appearance, you risk getting swept up

in narcissism and materialism. These are the very distractions that teachers try to lead students away from.

"Yoga is a science of self-realization, not ego aggrandizement," Cox says. "While *saucha* (cleanliness and purity) is important, society's emphasis on purchasing one's identity through fashion is a dark force that holds people's development down."

To stay grounded, Noah Maze, a Los Angeles-based, certified Anusara Yoga teacher, encourages fellow teachers to focus on letting the real power of their message be conveyed through what they say and do.

### **The Dress-for-Success Checklist**

While scouring your wardrobe before your next class, consider the following advice:

**Remember your divinity.** As a teacher, ask yourself what helps you remember your highest spiritual nature, Khalsa advises. Dress to inspire that highest consciousness in yourself and in others.

**Keep it real.** "Be truthful," Merrigan says. Avoid putting on another layer or costume. Let your clothing liberate rather than bind you.

**Consider comfort and practicality.** "If you are comfortable, that will be what is conveyed, regardless of what you wear," Maze says. Remember that if you can't move and demonstrate easily, then what you are wearing is a hindrance rather than an enhancement.

**Celebrate beauty.** Enjoy, enhance, and adorn your beauty. Show up to each class fresh, clean, and polished like a beautiful piece of art.

**Be creative and have fun!** When we adorn ourselves to honor our own divinity and to uplift others, yoga and fashion become sacred allies. "We can inspire our students with our words and our presence," Rumbaugh says, "and our presence is certainly enhanced by how we dress."

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