

From The Yogi Banker: Yoga for Men

by Scott Robinson



Scott Robinson has lived in London for the last 15 years. Initially from Sydney, Australia, Scott qualified as a lawyer and has worked for international law firms and investment banks in both London and New York. He now works in a regulatory capital advisory role at a leading global financial institution in the City of London. Scott has found that the practice of yoga and all things holistic has really helped him manage stress and allow him to perform at an optimal level at the bank.

The phenomenal rise in popularity of yoga has been remarkable. With more and more focus on wellness and lifestyle choices in the West, yoga fits into this movement like a neat accessory.

However, the face of yoga is often female. In my own experience in studios in London and other cities, as well as on retreats, I estimate that classes are filled with 80% or more women students. In fact, at times you can feel like the only male swimming in a sea of females of the species. Not that this is particularly an issue if you are comfortable in your own skin but, for some guys, that's not an environment they thrive in.

The irony of this gender transformation is that yoga traditionally was mostly for men. Influential teachers like Swami Sivananda and Krishnamacharya (teacher of BKS Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois) famously opened their schools to selected women (and non-Indians) in the early 20th century, but certainly when you look at early representations of yogis, they are almost exclusively male. I have seen photos of many

male yogis from yesteryear in all sorts of twists and poses, at which you can only stare and wonder how a guy can possibly do that. We all know that women are generally more flexible than men, but yoga has been around for ages. So, all these advanced postures have been performed by men for centuries. After recently observing Nico Luce doing such feats in deft gravity-defying manner, I witnessed first hand that the male body, with enough training and effort, is indeed capable of many things.

This post then is not going to tell you why more men should do yoga. I could tell you it's great for your strength, flexibility, sex life, etc... but that's all been said before. No, I'm going to give you a different insight into why more men need to get back on the mat and reacquaint themselves with this ancient practice.

Space. Yes, that's right. Space. The space in which we operate and go about our busy working days. For a City male in the high octane world of law firms, investment banks or whatever chosen stress-inducing profession of your fancy, quite frankly that space becomes tighter and tighter, to the point that we cannot (metaphorically speaking) breathe. As was remarked recently, regarding a different topic, the demands of working in investment banking are 'simply insane'.

Yoga gives us back that space. As we move through the postures, we breathe through the stress and anxiety of our daily lives. We may hold it there, in silence, and simply observe it as we weave our bodies through the practice.

My Friday night practice is a perfect example of this as I ground myself and reflect upon a busy week. My teacher always reminds us to find that 'drishti point', a point of focus for any asana. I liken this focal point to any object that is the centre of attention in our busy lives – look it in the eye and breathe, and move through the posture again. That way, we can take the space that we have created on the mat, back into our ordinary lives. Some would call it resilience. I would call it perspective.

So for you corporate guys out there who think yoga is just for ladies, think again. If performance at work is about gaining that winning mental edge, look no further than the yoga mat. You'd be surprised how much of a difference it can make.

As Slider said to Maverick in the legendary film *Top Gun*: "Remember boys, there's no points for second place". I liken my yoga practice to exactly that – despite yoga being totally non-competitive in its mindset. My (not so secret) practice keeps me floating above the surface and performing at my personal best. Come on guys, what are you waiting for?

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