

TAKE YOUR YOGA WITH YOU

Solutions for Road Rage and Beyond

BY GARTH HEWITT



Driving on the freeway in Los Angeles often resembles a scene from the movie *The Fast and the Furious*.

One memorable day, I watched a car in my rearview mirror come close to rear-ending me several times. I pulled into another lane as the car sped past me to nearly slam into the car ahead. From my vantage point, the driver appeared completely out of control—hitting the gas to rocket forward while alternately slamming on the brakes. When the traffic stopped again, I found myself next to this car. I looked over at the driver, who was yelling at the car in front of her and flailing her arms. She suddenly noticed me. Her eyes narrowed as she glared—she raised her arm, gave me the finger and mouthed the words “F\$%K Y*U!”

The woman in the car that day seemed to be holding some pretty intense stuff inside. Her anger wasn’t really with me, though, or

with the driver in front of her. We were innocent bystanders in her “drive-by shooting” of emotions.

I’m a yoga teacher. I was on my way to teach a yoga class. This woman’s behavior was fascinating to me—especially how it relates to what we practice in yoga.

It’s common to see some version of road rage on the freeway in Los Angeles on almost every trip you take. One of my teachers used to end class saying, “Take your yoga with you; let people in on your drive home, don’t flip anybody off.”

You don’t have to be in a yoga studio to be practicing yoga. Often our best practices are outside the studio. The intensity of navigating traffic when you have somewhere to go is not that different from the intensity of holding a pose while remaining focused and allowing things to become uncomfortable. Learning to

be in the fire without being caught up in it is one of the keys to a yoga practice.

This fire and intensity is what we call *tapas* in Sanskrit. Yet this fire and intensity alone is not yoga. Practicing the art of surrender while in the fire and staying present to your experience is what distinguishes merely taking the shape of an *asana* to actually practicing yoga.

We all have times in our lives when we are the person with “road rage”. The remedy to this rage can be found in our yoga practice as well as in our ability to rehearse a new pattern of not attaching while we are in the fire and our stuff is coming up. This rehearsal begins on the yoga mat or your meditation cushion.

Think of your practice space as a microcosm of the rest of your life. Yoga doesn’t turn down the heat or take away all of the stress in your life. Yoga helps you focus on

changing your relationship to the fire by learning to be in the fire.

In yoga, through practices such as asana and meditation, we learn to let go of old patterns, and release physical and mental tension. It is important to note that these things aren't created by the fire of intensity but are simply brought to the surface from having been stored as tension in the body and from the subconscious part of our mind.

Yoga teaches us to surrender and let go. When you are in the fire, what are your tools? Your breath. So breathe. Surrender. Give up control. When something is rocking your boat—let it go.

Yoga teaches us to stay present, observing and witnessing without becoming attached. Stay present. Observe. Witness. Watch your mind judging, commenting and criticizing—sometimes other people, sometimes yourself.

Yoga teaches us to practice gratitude for this day and this moment. When you feel gratitude, your perspective quickly shifts to the present moment and you can more easily let go of whatever you are getting caught up in. Practicing gratitude allows us to connect to the present moment more often and also helps us to stay positive.

There are times when a reaction or emotional response is appropriate, when you should attach to something that is happening or coming up. Practicing yoga and meditation can help sharpen your mind to discern the difference between a situation that requires a response and a situation where it's better to let go.

The next time you are caught up in rush hour traffic and you have somewhere to go, practice applying the things you are learning in yoga and meditation. Try to slow your breath and breathe into what you are feeling. Breathe into the intensity as though you're on your mat, in the middle of a long hold of a pose like Warrior Two.

Surrender. Accept the situation exactly as it is. It doesn't matter if you get upset the traffic isn't going to move any faster. If you feel yourself becoming agitated try to just observe your thoughts and your emotions. Let them come up and then let them go. Watch what comes up for you without becoming caught up in it.

Take a moment and offer gratitude for something or someone in your life and for this moment and everything that has led you up to this moment.

Let someone in. Don't flip anyone off. Take your yoga with you.

Garth Hewitt is an E-RYT and teacher trainer who is certified as a yoga therapist, Yogaworks teacher and DharmaYoga teacher who is passionate about yoga, sharing the teachings of his teachers, and living a healthy and balanced life. He regularly leads classes, workshops, retreats, and teacher trainings in LA and around the world: garthhewittyoga.com.

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