



THE UNCOMMON YOGI

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created in partnership with Jana
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

A Note from Jana

- || The making of the Uncommon Yogi started with a trip I made to West Africa (Ghana) in 2003 with a group of Black yoga teachers. I was in search of ancestral family and an understanding of my own cultural identity and the intersection of yoga. I was curious to see if and how yoga showed up among the people and places I visited. These were some of the questions/discussions that were raised and what was revealed that led to the research I compiled that went into producing the short documentary. ||

01. *Who are the people in the U.S. we call African-Americans?*

Where did they come from? What was their unique identity? These questions open the discussion to an exploration of the intersection of yoga practice among African Americans today and the cosmologies and spiritualities of their ancestors. Although there has been an erosion of these spiritual beliefs and connections, an imprint remains and has supported how Black people have endured despite the trauma that impacted every aspect of their lives.

02. *What were the spiritualities that existed before the imposition of Western (European) Christianity?*

Black people have fervently embraced Christian ideology and practices, and it has often served them well despite its disruption and disconnection to the traditional culture. Yet, the ways in which they have expressed Christianity has incorporated rituals of prayer and worship that contained roots to the healing practices inherent in traditional African spiritual beliefs. These questions invite a discussion, exploration, and identification of African spiritualities and how they were primarily healing practices., i.e., Vodun, Yoruba, Ifa, Islam, etc.

03. *What was their connection to yoga? (As a non-Western healing practice)*

Discuss the power and understanding of the connection to the natural forces of Earth during the era of enslavement as a healing tool. We can elevate parallels to the practices of yoga and Ayurveda.

04. *What is the importance of knowing this?*

The African past, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, surviving slavery, and Jim Crow, are connected to the the trauma experienced by Black people living within an oppressive culture today. The healing power of yoga as a supportive practice has parallels to the ancestral healing/spiritual practices still alive in their DNA.

05. *How does this impact the experience of 21st century yoga?*

Yoga supports community connection and development by cultivating a sense of belonging. The ideal of West African societies was centralized around the collective experience and not that of "rugged individualism." Black Yoga Teachers Alliance sees a direct correlation between the principles of the Nguzo Saba or Kwanzaa principles, i.e., unity, self-determination, collective work & responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, faith, and the alignment with the yamas and niyamas of yoga.

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