

## ★ **Yoke: My Yoga of Self-Acceptance**

**Jessamyn Stanley**

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Jessamyn Stanley is acclaimed for *Every Body Yoga*, which opened the practice to people of all shapes and sizes; her memoir, *Yoke*, is intimate in recording how she discovered her true self.

Tough yet sensitive to raw places in the soul, Stanley's book reveals what it feels like to be a fat, Black, queer yoga teacher in the often thin, white, straight world of the American yoga industry. Her narrative flavored with Black vernacular, Stanley comes down hard on racism, cultural appropriation, and exalted egos. And those whose yoga consists of trying to be the first in class to master the headstand or win the "best yoga wear" argument will find that this book takes them by the shoulders, stares right into their eyes, and pulls them somewhere deeper. It's the soul that Stanley's talking about—the self with a capital s.

Stanley shows that root meaning of "yoga" is "to yoke," explaining that "when someone you love dies and you find a way to (somehow) keep your head above water, that's yoga. You yoke when you find a reason to get out of bed in the morning. You yoke when you peel yourself off the pavement after your heart's been broken (again)." This is real yoga, made for troubled times.

Stanley recalls facing up to a raging case of imposter syndrome, battling shame, and struggling under the weight of the masks and bandages that hid her long-term wounds. But she also shows how she embraced what, for her, is real yoga—not a pale imitation of South Asian yoga with all the spiritual juice squeezed out of it, but the yoga of self-acceptance, honed by the rigors of everyday life.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2021)

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