Yoga, Jiu-Jitsu & Healing: How Breathwork & Movement Change Everything Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introductions and Yoga Background

Hey guys, I'm Dr. Megan Jimenez. I am an orthopedic surgeon in Jiu-Jitsu Brown Belt. Here with my good friend Christopher Wilkes. He is the owner of this establishment that we're in right now called the Art of Yoga in Columbus, Georgia.

So excited to have him here because he has been a blessing to me and my yoga instructor for the past about two and a half, three years. he's been practicing yoga since 2006. When did you open your practice here?

The end of December 2018. Yeah, so it's been just about six years. Wow, it has been a while you've been here. And he just got back from India. He's traveling and practicing yoga with various experts in the field and just gaining a lot of knowledge to bring back to us.

So thanks for being here, Christopher. Thank you for having me, Megan. Dr. Jujitsu. Oh yes, that is right. His Instagram is the Yoga Doctor, so we say DrYoga and DrJujutsu, and we're here as a good team.

That's right! Thank you. What got you into yoga? I started out actually practicing Tai Chi and Qigong. So I had like this period of time when I was in college and I going through this self-help inner journey phase and was really into Bruce Lee.

I practiced a lot of martial arts and practicing QIGONG and then I got into meditation. I read a book by Russell Simmons called Do You? And he talked a lot about how yoga and meditation helped take his life to the next level.

And that inspired me to start practicing. So I was going through a rough breakup at the time and I looking for something inside of myself to help me feel better.

Yoga was so much more than what I'd expected. We've talked about that because what brought me you was a breakup that I had as well back in 2021. And that's kind of what led me on the journey to start writing a book and start doing this and helping people, especially athletes and jujitsu athletes in particular, because that is my passion.

But that breakup led to exactly what you said, look for something inside of me to help instead of an external source that was going to make me happy. Because that isn't possible.

And that's what yoga is. It's an inner journey of exploration. The physical, it's the mental, the emotional, and it is the spiritual. I was coming to yoga at first, also just for the back pain, but I found out how the pain was connected to my emotional womb.

How Yoga Helped Through Breakups and Healing

You know, I lost the woman who had my back most, so I felt like my backbone was gone, my backs started giving out. So then I found that place of peace and strength and balance inside of myself and strengthened my back and strengthen my resolve.

And what brought you to open this studio? It was always a passion of mine because I felt so good after my first practice. I was like, man, I have to start sharing this with people.

Like people need to know how good this feels. So my sister was my student and I never thought that I could actually charge people, but she was, like you're good at this.

You should maybe think about, you know, teaching a class somewhere in the community. And I said, okay, well who would pay for that? Like I didn't pay it for a start.

Now I'm just looking at YouTube videos, videos on TV. But then, you know, more people just started to say, You should do it, go for it. And eventually I started putting myself out there as the yoga doctor because I knew how it helped me to heal from the inside out.

So I would share a little health and wellness tips, essential oils, and daily health practices that would help people to balance themselves. So I'm writing a book and I have yoga in I think two chapters of the book because it's been such an influential part of my journey to becoming or getting my full potential and being my best self.

So in my cross-training chapter, I talk about yoga for athletes in particular. Like you said, i came in originally because i was stiff as a board. I was constantly upside down in jiu-jitsu.

You could barely turn my head. And I said I need something that's not massage, physical therapy. Need an addition and something. That's going to spend more time.

And I'm moving my own body. So I came in for my body, but what I've left with is so much more and it's more of the mind. Just doing the practice, you always say it.

You're like mental chatter. Your mental chatter is going nuts. Like, look, take it in, accept it, and I used to get really frustrated because my mind couldn't stop.

Same here. I remember there was some days I would be, you know, holding a pose because there's a lot of poses you hold and you're just in this static position and start getting pissed off.

And you like, my arms are burning. Just supposed to be breathing here and I'm looking at the teacher and they're smiling and chit chatting and stuff. It's like.

You know you have so much going on in your head and realize that you having this conversation with yourself and really start to see what comes up for yourself.

So the amount of I guess you could say self-study that comes up even in the practice. You get to know yourself better, like how you respond to difficult situations.

What's your inner dialogue and conversation like? And then when you see what your response is, you sometimes how to even get in your own way, in physical activity, mental activity or any other type of activity in a world.

So it's a perfect reflection for living life, not just on the mat, but how you can transfer those life skills off of the map when you're in a challenging situation, with your mental chatter, your conversation with yourself.

So you also taught me that yoga is more than just the poses, right? Yes. When I came in, I was like, all right, can hold these poses. I'm strong. It's fine.

But you taught me how much more there was. And we do hot yoga here, which is my favorite because it's my… I think you get five in one when I am here.

Well, with you in particular too, right? Not all… I've been to other yoga studios that it is just like hold the pose, move on, it more militant. Then I love that, that's great for the physical body.

Opening the Studio and Teaching an Integrative Practice

but I do that a lot in jiu-jitsu. Where it in the gym and I push through things and exercises to get my body strong Here you got heat, you've got strength, muscle endurance when we're holding poses.

We have meditation, we have breath work. So to me, I'm getting so many things in one session. How do you communicate that to other people to try and expect more or look for a place that you get more than just a stretch?

True. When I first started, it was very much like that too. I was just doing the movements and becoming more flexible. But I have a saying that if your mind becomes flexible, your body can become flexible And when your breath becomes steady, your mind becomes steadied, and when you mind become steady this is yoga.

Yoga means balance, it means harmony. So when there's a practice that can give you so much, why just shortchange yourself and only take one thing out of another practice, or two things out the practice when it's really like a whole handful of things that you can get from the practices.

I always say that yoga is movement with a higher purpose. literally liberates yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually all through the yoga practice if you embrace all that it represents.

And I try to infuse that into each class by setting the tone for mindfulness, for tuning into your body through your breath. for the philosophy that grounds the foundation of the yoga practice.

And I feel like I have a unique way of presenting an integrative practice that makes it accessible for people that wouldn't normally want to get into all that spiritual mumbo jumbo.

I know it's like a bad word. Yeah. But I think more people are opening up to it nowadays because, you know, not to bash church or religion or anything.

It's just, I just feel like people who are becoming more spiritual because they just want more. They want to find that inner journey of happiness without having to go somewhere else or without have to take some substance or, go pay half of your paycheck.

Whatever, you know what I mean? Yeah. Yeah, I agree and it is becoming more I guess trendy more of a thing Yeah Because people are realizing with especially there's a lot of autoimmune diseases on the rise There's so many issues happening with the body that are more than mental health, right?

But then they always come back to your mental Health and your mindset. I think this is super important to help people on physical and mental journeys And I treat this as a holistic approach to well-being because it's done so much for my mental health and my well being, like just the practice of meditating every day, being able to sit comfortably in stillness without thoughts of the past or thoughts the future.

robbing you of the joy of just being here or just be present. A lot of people are hurting in ways that you can't really see and that's what it was for me.

I found yoga again also when I was going through a divorce and it took a lot forgiveness inside of myself that I had to cultivate in order to get over that heartbreak and to release things that were holding me blocked in my heart center and things were keeping me up at night in mind So it's a complete practice of self-transformation if you allow it to be and if allow yourself to travel down that rabbit hole.

You brought up meditation and you said you can stay present without worrying about the past and the future. But I know myself and a lot of people, we sit to meditate and immediately get pretty frustrated because the thoughts just come right in.

So how do you meditate? What do recommend people do? Even 10 minutes to me sometimes seems like forever. No, seriously, and that's normal because it wasn't always easy for me to just be able to sit still comfortably.

And there's still days that I have thoughts that come and go. It's not that you're trying to stop all thoughts, but you are allowing yourself the time and the space to settle in and sit.

I like to think of it as like a snow globe. You shake it up and when it first starts, all the thoughts are swirling around

like the snowglobe. But over time, as you let it sit, you just see everything start to slowly fall to the bottom.

And it comes with time. It doesn't happen in your first meditation, your second or your third. But there's also some simple techniques such as just following the breath.

The breath is the only thing that's always happening right now. So, you know, thoughts are past or future.

Yoga for Mindfulness, Meditation, and Breathwork

What's happening right now always constantly is the heart's beating and the breath is flowing in and out. So if you're able to use the breathe as an anchor or an awareness tool just by following the breathtaking in out, that's one of the easiest things I would recommend for beginners that are trying to cultivate a meditation practice.

Do you use any guidance or music when you meditate? When I first started meditation, I did guided meditation with Deepak Chopra. Those were highly instrumental in helping me to shift my mindset from what I was feeling about like when I'm going through my divorce, to be able to shift my consciousness to say, okay, that's not something that happened to me per se, rather it happened for me to reframe my perspective or to grow through this experience.

So when you can reshape how you experience something, That's really the only thing that you do about something has happened. You have to reshape or reframe the experience into something that will help to serve you for your personal growth.

Otherwise, you're going to play victim mentality. So transitioning a little bit to athletes, how do you think yoga can help athletes of any sport? I mean, you know, my sport is jiu-jitsu and that was the main reason that I found you for that avenue because there is research to show increased flexibility and balance, which obviously great things for jitsu, even if you don't know what jui- jutsu is and you just think of people rolling around or wrestling.

Those two things are pretty important. So not just that sport, but any sport. How would you promote it? What would say to athletes to tell them to come in?

For athletes, I would it's a perfect prophylactic for injuries. It will help to prevent injuries in the long run. Whatever sport you do, it will strengthen your range of motion around all of your joints.

it'll strengthen you mentally, especially like in a hot yoga class where you're in the heat of the moment and you having to dig deeper and your having breathe and having focus will strengthen your focus, your mental clarity with the meditation so that, you know, Maybe you had an argument with your girlfriend or boyfriend or whoever the day before, that won't interfere, you know, what's happening right now with the job that you have at hand, the task you need to get done, because it'll put you intensely into that present moment.

Your breath, your breath control, I can't stress the breath. The breath really is the key to so many things, whether it's unlocking your flexibility or ascending and transcending to deeper states of meditation.

your breath, or even just regulating your body temperature. I'm sure you've done some stuff with the cold plungers and the coal baths. You did too. The breath is the key, I have.

And the breath the is key to not freezing to death and not passing out when you're in a hot class, learning how to regulate your energy through your breathe.

or not panicking, the breath is the panic that sends you out of the tank, out the cold tank or out at the class. And I've seen it happen in class too.

The heat, I think, sends people running because they're not breathing. So your heart is always beating and that's an automatic thing, but your breath as one of few things that can be done automatically and also consciously.

So when you consciously learn how to regulate your breath, you're really tapping into a key that can help you with

overcoming a lot of things mentally, physically, emotionally, as well as in your nervous system.

Awesome. You also have a lot of military that are in here. So typically yoga, you think women in Lululemon pants, right? Right. Like you'd think of spandex and lots of women.

Sometimes I come into your class and I see just we are on Columbus, Georgia, so we're by Fort Moore by a military base. But these guys are just they're in there and they are doing yoga that might have been seen as like girly or feminine or no, we don't do that.

more men kind of thing. How do you get military guys in here and what do think it has kind benefit for them, probably similar to athletes? Yeah, yeah.

I think a lot of the military guy realize how much of a beating that their body takes with all of their rigorous activity and things that they have to do and endure.

So the challenge of yoga practice is just as much a mental, emotional, know, as well as physical challenge for them. And it helps them to be more resilient, helps him to feel better.

It helps with their recovery. A lot of the guys come on their for their Recovery Day. That's their active recovery, but you'll see that at the end of class always ask people, how do you feel in one word or less?

A guy say, calm. relaxed, peaceful, at ease, you know, things you wouldn't expect somebody who's ready for war, ready to battle the field, but it's like it takes them out of that fight or flight that they're always in when they are in combat mode and helps to return them back to that calm, still, center place of peace and strength and resiliency.

Can you talk about breath work, specifically the different types that you do while we're in class? And like you talked about the fight or flight with the soldiers, kind of calming them down.

And I think a lot of it has to do with breathwork that start out with too, that kind sets the pace for how we can all lower that fight-or-flight response a bit.

Certainly. So the first practice that we do is called Ujjayi breath. and it's an even inflow through the nose and out through nose. But what you do is you stimulate your parasympathetic nervous system by making a sound like over the back of the throat as you breathe in and as your breathe out.

And what's the parasympathetic nervous system? So that's part of your nervous that is rest, digest, relax, repair yourself versus the fight or flight which is the opposite.

Fight or fight, ready for battle, go to war, adrenaline is pumping. So when you set the tone, you immediately start to feel relaxed. If you've ever felt stressed out, that was one of first things you do without anyone telling you, Big sigh breath.

Yeah. And you can literally feel a wave of relief float through your body as you're sighing out. So I set the tone for calming and balancing and centering through that initial breath practice.

Now, if we're going to do something that's more energetic, more fiery, we want to build up more heat. We'll do what's called breath of fire. That's and you can feel the energy and the fire starting to build up.

Because when it's cold outside, what does your body start to do? It starts to shiver, it starts move. So you need to something to help build that extra heat in the body to prepare you for what's coming.

There's several different types of practice. It's just depending on what your purpose is for the breath practice, do you want to calm down or you wanna ramp the up?

Can you talk about the calming one again, how people can do it at home? Like how you would teach people maybe

they're listening to the podcast and not watching.

How would you teach somebody to do that? They're in a stressful situation right now and they want to practice. Certainly. So if you're ever in a stressful situation or you have a moment to yourself, we can step away.

I always say, if have moment step where you can always, say excuse me, I need to go to the restroom and go step way to their restroom for five minutes.

Kundalini, Asanas, and Shavasana

So you sitting on the toilet seat, wherever you are sitting, standing. Our recommend sitting with your back straight. You come to a comfortable seated position.

Now your eyes gently close and just simply first bring your awareness to your breath. And just notice how your breath is at this present moment. Breathing in and out through the nose.

Once you notice, how you breath, is that this president moment, begin to consciously lengthen your inhale and length in your exhale, making the inhalation just as long as the exhalation.

So breathing in for a count of four, three, two, One, breathing out, two, three, four. Breathing in, Two, Three, Four. Breathe in out. Two. Three. Four, continue breathing in.

You want to feel the breath resonate over the back of the throat as you breathe in as your exhale like you're fogging up a glass with your mouth closed.

So like, but with you mouth close. Making that same sound now as you breathe in. Partially constricting the back of the throat. Imagine you're drawing the breath up the front of your throat through a straw.

That's a weird analogy, but you'll hear the sound that it's making. I also like to use the analogy of an ocean. Visualize that is like the tide rolling in and rolling out.

Or for all my Star Wars fans, I like to say, imagine you're Darth Vader breathing. Take three more rounds of breath here, just like that. Last time. Now, sit in still, letting go of any regulation of the breath and simply notice and observe the subtle shift in difference in your breath, your mind, and your body, in you awareness.

noticing how the breath is more at ease, more relaxed, noticing the body's more eased, and more relax. Then whenever you're ready, allow the eyes to gently open.

Now it's just a couple moments of breath, conscious breath. How do you feel after that, Dr. Jujitsu? Pretty calm. So just imagine a whole class of consciously regulating your breath You literally get high on the breath.

High on life. All right, so breath is one of the big components that you really stress, which I love, because you're always telling us when to breathe.

Otherwise, our body goes into automatic pilot. In addition to the breadth work, we talk about your style of yoga, one the styles being kundalini. I say that right?

Kundalani. Kundlini, can you explain what that is? Because I hear that word a lot, but I don't really know what it is. So Kundalini, the word Kundu means like a spiral or coiled up energy.

So your Kundulini energy is said to sit at the base of your spine, your sacrum. It's called the sacram because it has roots in the words sacred and that's a sacred energy So that sacred energy is laying dormant at the base of your spine.

Dormant in the sense like a seed is dorment until you plant it and you give it the right conditions for that growth, for

the energy to spiral upwards.

So if you've ever planted anything in a garden you'll see that when you planted it's there, you don't see anything happening, but you water it, add the sunshine, the light energy, and eventually a little leaf starts to spiral up.

So it's the same thing with your energy. You have this seed of potential that's within you. And once you start to awaken or activate that energy with the light of your consciousness, with breath word, your intention, that will begin to spiral up.

It's a healing energy that you can use to create It's like sexual energy, you can use it to create a child, or you could use to it create the life of your dreams.

So you literally transmute and draw this energy up your spine from earth, as it's called in the lower energy centers, to heaven, in higher energy center.

You're learning this journey of drawing your energy so that you use for healing, for manifesting, creating whatever it is you wanna create in this world.

What are the actual poses called? Poses in the yoga practice are called asanas. So when you're practicing the physical movements, those are different asanas.

Like this right here, this is a seat, and then we call this an asana. Your asaana is where you sit. In a sense, you want to be able to sit or hold any asuna, any pose, with a comfortable, steady breath.

Yoga for Sleep, Athletes, and Military Recovery

If you are not able hold the pose in a steady and comfortable way with your breath, then maybe you need to ease or modify or adjust the pose because all asanas are meant to be held in a meditative way.

Awesome. What is your favorite part about yoga? Shavasana. The end. That's what everybody loves. So yeah, because after you just give your all, you've literally physically taxed yourself.

You've pushed and stretched in every way, there's nothing more relaxing than just taking an adult nap time, as a lot of people like to call it. give it all and you let it go.

It's literally practicing letting go and a lot of people find it easier to rest in Shavasana after you've had a physically demanding practice because that's the purpose of it.

You're supposed to push and stretch and strengthen and sweat until you literally have nothing left and you're able to just quote unquote die. Shivasana is like a corpse pose.

So it's like practicing death or practicing releasing, letting go. So literally letting go of your thoughts, letting off your worries, your fears, let it go off the physical body, and letting it off of the breath.

Just letting all that shit go, whatever it is. And just being still, completely being relaxed and at one. So how much do you think your sleep changed from before yoga practice to after yoga practices, especially with the mind?

Yes. I tell everyone, if you haven't done a yoga you will get the best sleep ever guaranteed after you do a yoga practice. Like if you had difficulty sleeping, it's just something about it.

All the breath, all the stretching, you just feel so relaxed and at ease. And you'll be like, wow, I had the the sleep every that night. You'll wonder what it was.

That's how it for me. I was like I didn't smoke or drink anything, but I feel it so high and I slept so good and so deep. So I highly recommend if you've never tried a yoga practice, try a practice if want some of the best sleep ever.

How can people find practices like what you do? What should we search for? You know, I'm moving soon, so what should I look for to have a full yoga and not just do the asanas?

I teach what's called an integrative yoga. So it integrates what are called the eight limbs of yoga, The eight limbs of yoga are yamas and niyamas, which is the philosophical aspect.

Pranayama, the breath practice, or the energy control practice that you get from the breathe. And then there's asana, which is the actual physical movements.

There's also meditation, concentration, and focus that's cultivated within that practice, Which leads you ultimately to just being able to experience that oneness.

So it's a journey. Some people say that that the ashtanga path or raja yoga path, which means eight-limbed path. Anybody that practices an ashta yoga practice or a raya yoga ideally would be leading you on that journey towards getting a full integrative practice.

But if you ever see a practice called Integrative Yoga Practice, you can know that you're going to get more than just asana. Kundalini practice is great because you'll get the breath work, you will get challenging movements, and you get some stretch.

And you definitely push your potential in new ways.

Finding Christopher and Closing Remarks

So Kundalin practice or integrative yoga practice, I feel like those are some of your best bets for really challenging and pushing yourself to get a complete well-rounded experience in a yoga class.

Are many people using hot yoga when they do the integrative yoga? Not necessarily. I just happen to do that because that's what people love and want here.

And I'm here to serve the people that show up. So I will give you the full complete package in any class, whether it's a hot class or a chill, relaxed class.

Always try to deliver that complete package of everything that yoga represents. The healing, the stretching, balancing, strengthening, and meditativeness.

That's awesome. Well, I'm going to miss you. I want to Miss you too, Dr. Jujitsu. Please don't be a stranger. No, i will be back to visit. Where can people find you?

You can find me on instagram at the Yoga Doctor or you can follow our yoga studio page at Art of Yoga Columbus GA on both Facebook and Instagram. Yeah, Columbus, Georgia.

So we're about two hours south of Atlanta and the big military base here. Anybody coming through with the army, definitely come check out Christopher and get a good stretch and a mental workout.

Thank you so much. Thanks again. Namaste. That just means the light, spirit, the energy in me. I have the same light spirit and energy. and ironic media productions.

Visit us at I R O N I C K media dot com.