

LIFE

centered stage

Theatre Dojo teaches acting and asana.

DOWN DOG AND MELODRAMA? For a group of yoga-minded actors, this unlikely combination is very powerful. Theatre

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Dojo, in Los Angeles, blends yoga, pranayama, and meditation into its beginning through advanced acting classes. In the process, the school's founders teach students to tap into their own innate healing power.

"The idea behind [this kind of] theater is that telling your story and getting to know your body will heal you, get you unstuck," says Theatre Dojo's Jen Swain.



Theatre Dojo teaches aikido as well as yoga.

"That's my personal story. You're always, in any kind of aware movement, going to make a friend of your body."

In addition to yoga, the studio teaches tai chi and aikido to its 30 or so students. Acting exercises typically follow a yoga or tai chi warm-up, pranayama, and meditation. Throughout class, students do asanas as they practice their lines.

For Swain, an actress and a yoga teacher, acting and yoga go hand in hand. Slipping into vinyasa just before going onstage is part of her routine, helping her stay present and work through the fear she still experiences after years of performing. When she was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2004, a crucial part of her journey back to health comprised yoga and meditation.

Swain, who is now cancer free, realized that the techniques could help others ease their own fears and anxieties — no matter what the cause. So in 2006, she and a friend, actor and meditation teacher Algernon D'Ammassa, opened Theatre Dojo. Here they hoped to expose actors to yoga, yogis to acting, and newcomers to both disciplines. The method has won rave reviews from the theater's students.

"If your body is in a challenging pose, you're working with the energy in your body, and it releases new ways of saying the lines," says actress Jennifer Haley. For Haley, Theatre Dojo's techniques have

also inspired new levels of communication. “Anytime you can share freely who you are with another person and they can reciprocate...I can’t articulate how healing it is,” she says. HEATHER BOERNER