

Yoga System Centering Black Cultures & Wellness Developed by Queer Yoga Educator To Provide Safe Haven for Marginalized Black Yogis



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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Western appropriation of present-day yoga has cut off many of the people who could benefit from yoga the most. Potential Black yogis often feel excluded from yoga because what they see in the mainstream does not reflect them. Kamili Yoga is a modern Pan-African system that addresses this deep disconnect.

Eternity Philops knows firsthand the need for more yoga spaces that serve marginalized populations. A Black queer yoga educator and owner of Charlotte-based Soul Liberation Wellness, Eternity (she/they/Mx.) teaches holistic yoga to Black, POC, and QTPOC communities. It all began in 2017 when Eternity earned two yoga teacher certifications: one in Hatha Yoga, a widespread Indian system, and another in Kemetic Yoga, a lesser-known system based on ancient African-Egyptian society.

“My training in Kemetic Yoga taught me that there is more to yoga on a global level, even beyond India,” Eternity reflects. “It showed me that we have yoga systems that focus on Black being.”

But aside from a few dance-based styles, Eternity couldn’t find many other Black-centered yoga systems. Seeing room for more, Eternity decided to develop one. And in July 2020, after years of conception and in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Kamili Yoga was born.

From the African KiSwahili word for “complete” and the Indian Sanskrit word for “union,” Kamili Yoga is a contemporary creation that uses yoga to reconnect Black descendants of Africa to their cultural roots. To do so, Kamili Yoga incorporates KiSwahili for system principles, Adinkra symbols for meditations, the philosophies of Ma'at and Ubuntu as guiding community ethics, and more.

“I am one of many descendants of stolen and enslaved people with broken ties to their Motherland.” says Eternity. “I decided to use yoga to explore the expansiveness of my African ancestry.”

For Eternity, Kamili Yoga addresses the need for more diversity in a holistic practice that, despite being created by people of color, features mostly athletic White bodies. This limited representation has led many Black people, particularly those not thin and femme, to falsely believe that yoga is not for them.

“The truth is that yoga is a universal concept that belongs to all people,” Eternity says. “We just need more systems that de-center Western appropriation. Kamili Yoga helps us have more. Kamili Yoga honors the African ways of my generational ancestors with a system for new generations.”

Interested students can learn how to practice the system through virtual classes led by Eternity and through the Kamili Yoga Student App (available on Apple, Android, Amazon, and Roku). Details and more information can be found at www.KamiliYoga.com.

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