

LifeForce Yoga
Yoga for Trauma
2015



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Trauma Needs Bodywork

- We've all had experiences where we've had to shut down.
- Preverbal experiences
- The body remembers in the places we constrict.
- **Yoga is the most exquisite form of bodywork**

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Trauma as Portal

- The mind may go elsewhere—dissociates. (Pathologizing)
- Or can we cultivate a channel to other states of consciousness? A Gift.
- We can, through our practices, learn to control it, so it doesn't control us.
- Persephone Woman (Roger Woolger, Ph.D. *Other Lives, Other Selves* (1987))

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The Safe Container

“Crying is one of the highest spiritual practices.
One who knows crying knows yoga.”

~Swami Kripalu

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Centering Meditation

- Inner Sanctuary
- 4:4:6 Breath
- Movement & Mudra
 - Inhale arms out in front of the heart
 - Exhale hands in Eagle Mudra to the heart
- Toning (Nada Yoga)
 - Sha-ma-ya

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Trauma

Most of us have been traumatized by an event in our lives. That doesn't mean we suffer from PTSD. Statistics vary, but it is estimated that the same event may induce PTSD in 20 - 40% of those involved, while 60 - 80% recover quickly.

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD may occur when a person is threatened with death or serious injury, or witnesses such a threat to others. Someone involved in such an event may respond with feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

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Symptoms of PTSD

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Avoidance of activity or people reminiscent of the event
- Heightened arousal:
 - irritability
 - sleep disturbance
 - irrational fears of being unsafe
- Self-Medication with drugs & alcohol

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Yoga View: Grief in the Tissues

- *Samskaras* – Indelible imprints in our subconscious accrued through the experiences of daily life. They propel consciousness into action, *karma*, so that we repeat our patterned behavior (IV:9-11).
- *Vasana* – Web of samskaras—the template of our actions and reactions (IV:8).

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**Neurobiology is catching up with ancient
Yogic wisdom**

- *Vasana* relates to the development of our neuronal pathways.
- Chronic tensions held in the body/*samskara* relates to recent discovery of the role of the neuropeptides.

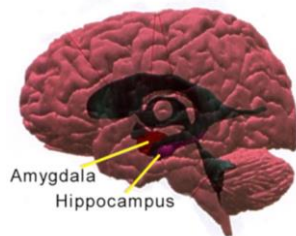
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Rewiring the Neuronal Paths

- Yoga dissolves the web so that we can respond without self-limiting reactions to what life brings.
- Neuroplasticity: Our brains are adaptable.
- We are **REWIRING** this week!

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**PTSD ~
Amygdala Whisperers**



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Trauma – What happens in the brain?

- Brain function research show that traumatic stress triggers subcortical (limbic/primitive brain/brain stem) responses that are irrelevant and often harmful in the present.
- Original event and present trigger increase blood flow in right medial frontal cortex, insula, amygdala & anterior temporal lobe. Deactivation of left hemisphere, specifically in Broca's area (speech).

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PTSD ...

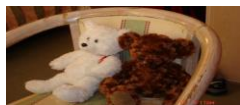
- **Shock Trauma:** Due to the increased levels of cortisol, the hippocampus has not functioned to store the memories of the event in chronological order. Rather, the memories are implicit. They are incoherent and fraught with emotion.



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Complex PTSD ...

- Cluster of symptoms observed in cases of prolonged abuse, particularly perpetrated against children by caregivers during multiple childhood and adolescent developmental stages.
- **Developmental Trauma:** Chronic, repetitive. The memory may be explicit, but completely devoid of emotional content.



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Left/right Hemisphere Integration

We need therapeutic strategies that address both sides of the brain, that invite emotional content (right side of the brain/implicit memory) back into explicit memory and logical narrative (left side/explicit memory) back into emotional coherence.

Daniel Siegel, M.D., quoted by Mary Sykes Wylie, "Mindsight," *Psychotherapy Networker*, Sept/Oct 2004

This is what yoga does.

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Bessel van der Kolk, MD Trauma Center, Brookline, MA

“As Long as people simply sit on their ‘tuchas’ and move their tongues around, they will never release the deepest level of trauma.”

Psychotherapy Networker, Feb, 2004

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PTSD: Yoga compared to DBT

- 8, 75-minute yoga sessions were compared to 8 sessions of group Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.
- Over 8 sessions of yoga with 8 subjects, HRV increased and PTSD symptoms decreased. (CAPS)
- Only Yoga group showed a decrease in frequency of intrusions and severity of hyperarousal symptoms.

Van der Kolk, BA, *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* (2006)

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“Neither CBT or psychodynamic psychotherapy pay sufficient attention to the experience and interpretation of disturbed physical sensations and preprogrammed physical action patterns.”

Van der Kolk, BA, *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* (2006)

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Yoga as Treatment for PTSD

1. Safe Container
2. Permission
3. Move slowly
4. Cue to sensation
5. Grounding
6. Recognize the “freeze”
7. Yoga Nidra
8. Therapeutic long holding

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Yoga for Complex Trauma

Sixty-four women with chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD were randomly assigned to either trauma-informed yoga or supportive women's health education, each as a weekly 1-hour class for 10 weeks. Assessments were conducted at pretreatment, midtreatment, and posttreatment and included measures of DSM-IV PTSD, affect regulation, and depression.

At the end of the study, 16 of 31 participants (52%) in the yoga group no longer met criteria for PTSD compared to 6 of 29 (21%) in the control group.

These improvements were maintained in the yoga group, while the control group relapsed after its initial improvement.

[Journal of Clinical Psychiatry](#), 2014 Jun;75(6):e559-65. doi: 10.4088/JCP.13m08561.
Yoga as an adjunctive treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder: a randomized controlled trial.
[van der Kolk BA¹](#), [Stone L](#), [West J](#), [Rhodes A](#), [Emerson D](#), [Suvak M](#), [Spinazzola J](#)

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Permission

- Permission (from the student)– Ask before hands-on adjustments.
- Permission (from you) is granted – to stop the process, be it a pose or an inquiry.
- Permission (from you) is granted – for feelings to flow on the yoga mat.

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**Cueing to Sensation
Moving Slowly**

Body Sensing

When you come to innocent unconditional listening, your body goes spontaneously into a deep peace.

~Jean Klein

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Body Sensing

- Guided practice with sensory details
- Cues to feel sensation are specific and direct, not global
- Movement is slow
- When incorporated into vinyasa or stronger practice, cue between sequences

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Safely Embodied

Body awareness, body scanning exercises, and body-sensing yoga, where *movement is accompanied by mindful attention to sensation and breath*, are vital core practices for those suffering from PTSD.

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Grounding

- Root chakra practices, including sitting and standing poses
- Mantra tone: Lum; So-hum
- Inhale: “I am” to the crown; Exhale: “Here,” to the feet

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PTSD

Practices for Anxiety (Rajasic)

1. Grounding/centering breaths like Yogic Three-Part (Dirga)
2. Bee Breath (Brahmari)
3. Alternate nostril (Nadi Shodhana)
4. Extend Exhalation
5. LifeForce Chakra Clearing Meditation - for anxiety (mantras & mudras)

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PTSD

Practices for Depression (Tamasic)

1. Bellows Breath (Bastrika - modified version)
2. Breath of Joy
3. Mountain Breath
4. Power Hara
5. Extend Inhalation
6. LifeForce Yoga Chakra Clearing Meditation to Energize (mantras & mudras)

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PTSD

On the Mat

Types of Postures:

- Core stabilizers (encourage a strong center)
- Strong standing postures (empowering)
- Forward bends and gentle hip openers (calming)

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Yoga Nidra

- Intention/resolve (*sankapla*)
 - Inner Sanctuary
 - Body Scan (*annamaya kosha*)
 - Breath Awareness (*pranamaya kosha*)
 - Feeling & Balancing the Opposites (*manomaya kosha & vijnanamaya kosha*)
 - Awareness of Self – “I am more...” (*anandamaya kosha*)
 - Suggestion: Self-acceptance, Gratitude
 - Intention/resolve (*sankapla*)
- Worse before better**

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To the extent that iRest practitioners can welcome the disparate poles of any experience, they have an opportunity to directly experience this background awareness as the deepest dimension of their own consciousness. They begin to recognize the part of themselves that was never divided or injured by traumatic events, healing the illusion of separation between self and Spirit.

L. Stankovic, MA, RYT, "Transforming Trauma: A Qualitative Study of iRest Yoga Nidra on Combat-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, No. 21 (2011)

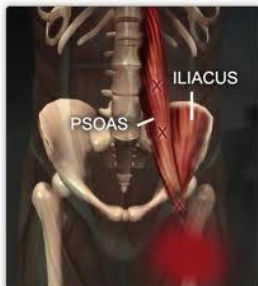
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Therapeutic Long Holding

- Facilitates non-reactive witness consciousness
- Releases long held body memories without the story attached
- Facilitates release of repressed emotions

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Therapeutic Long Holding



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Therapeutic Holding

- Permission
- Not about the story
- Inquiry into initial impulse to release
- Stay with sensation-watch it change
- Breathe into sensation
- Witness what arises without judgment
- Nothing will happen that you can't handle
- Shaking in psoas

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Melting the Freeze

- Guide breath
- Identify sights and sounds in the room
- Open the eyes
- Humor: "Am I having a good hair day or a bad hair day?" (*The Body Remembers Casebook*, Babette Rothchild)

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Therapeutic Release

- Listen to body – let the constricted prana guide
- It doesn't have to look like yoga
- Flow until your body takes you into child pose
 - Back press in child w/permission
- Savasana – full yoga nidra
- Partner sharing/check-in with yoga therapist
- Group sharing debriefing session

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Shanmukhi Mudra in a Clinical Setting



Psychologist and LifeForce Yoga® Practitioner Dr. Deborah Lubetkin teaching an anxious client suffering from anorexia the Shanmuki Mudra that accompanies Bee Breath (Brahmari) to calm her racing thoughts and focus her mind for the transition into therapy.

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Shanmukhi Mudra



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Practice II: Calming

- Bee Breath (Brahmari) – exhale only
 - Lips Closed
 - Chin slightly tucked
 - Root of the tongue to back of throat
- Mudra: Shanmuki
 - Index points to brow point
 - Middle covers eyes
 - Ring at edges of nostrils
 - Pinky at edges of lips



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