



BWY

AT
THE
HEART
OF YOGA

SPECTRUM

magazine

Yoga on and off the mat

Grounding

Preparing for the season

Velta: a tribute

A pioneer, poet and freedom fighter

autumn/
winter 2023
£2.95 free to members

Central Office enquiries:

If you have a question about your membership, we are here to help:

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Visit: www.bwy.org.uk

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The British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) is the largest yoga membership organisation in the country and the Sport England recognised national governing body for yoga. Spectrum magazine is our quarterly publication made available to our members. At our core remains our guiding philosophy to promote a greater understanding of yoga and its safe practice through experience, education, discussion, study and training.

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Letters for publication

The Editor and Spectrum reserve the right to select or reject letters for publication and to edit for grammar, length and style. We will only publish items appropriate for a magazine that promotes the principles of yoga and harmony and reflects the values of BWY.

The full list of BWY Specialist Advisers, along with advertising rates and specifications are now online at: www.bwy.org.uk

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Email spectrum@bwy.org.uk

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Email spectrum@bwy.org.uk

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Dear Members,

Welcome to the autumn/winter edition of Spectrum which we hope will inspire you on your yogic journey.

The simplicity of yoga always amazes me. In the sense of our journeys, simply by our commitment to our sadhana (our daily spiritual practice), our journeys continue to deepen and refresh. For instance, I had always believed that the practice of sukkha (or ease) integrated into our asana, breath work and yoga nidra, enabled us to conduct ourselves in our daily lives with a relaxed attentiveness, or sattvic state, so conducive to skilful living.

While I still believe this is true, I recently felt the importance of receptiveness that comes about through sukkha. Through cultivating relaxation and ease, as well as a listening with the witness mind, we're able to receive true intelligence from the world. This may come in the form of divine inspiration or intuition but only through that quiet, relaxed, listening mode can we be receptive to these subtle messages. It was my lightbulb moment after so many years of practice.

Speaking of years of commitment to their sadhana, this edition of Spectrum includes uplifting articles describing the amazing work of two exceptional women, Monica Burton and Velta Snikere Wilson. Monica Burton pioneered what we now call Gentle Years Yoga. Read about Monica's recent MBE for services to her yoga community. Don't miss the tribute to Velta, describing her commitment to everything yogic, from her role in establishing the BWY to inspiring poetry. Her quotes are truly uplifting.

Those feeling as if their own practice needs some inspiration will get ideas from Wendy Teasdill's home practice on page 10, and Sabine Dahn's article on the healing power of mantra. Helen Clay's important article on climate change not only reaffirms the yogic outlook of connectivity to all things but the BWY's commitment to our role in caring for the earth.

It might be of interest to those members who are not teachers to read about current teacher training courses being offered. There is also an article on Diploma Course Tutor Training, its successful and what's involved which may be of interest.

Last, but not least, we were thrilled to officially launch our new website at the Om Yoga Show in October. I hope many of you have taken advantage of the opportunity to pick up a free ticket for Om and if you did, we hope you had time to visit us while you were there.

But for now – make a cup of tea, settle into a blanket and enjoy your Spectrum.

Diana O'Reilly

BWY Chair



I am pleased to announce that we are in the final stages of refining our strategy which will define our future direction and bring added value to our members. It has been a huge collaborative effort involving both members, partners and yoga industry professionals, who have helped to validate our approach and ensure that it aligns with our charitable objectives. We are now diligently working through the finer details with a view to launch in early 2024.

Our presence at The Om Show earlier this month not only provided a way of capturing valuable feedback on aspects of our strategy, but also gave us the opportunity to engage with the wider public and showcase who we are and what we do. It was wonderful to see the richness and diversity of the yoga offered in the classes that our teachers led, as well as unveil our new website to the broader yoga community.

We extend special thanks to the website project team who have worked tirelessly this year to help create this new resource which will transform the way that people interact with us in the future. As with all new things, there have been issues, but far beyond the teething problems we would expect with any new website. When the website is released to you we welcome your feedback and we thank you for your patience and forbearance. You will receive a website questionnaire in the near future, so please do be sure to share your valuable insights when that arrives.

In response to the recent press spotlight on the lack of diversity within the yoga community, we have launched a trustee-led EDI committee to help bring meaningful change not just within the BWY but across the wider yoga landscape. In the coming months, we are looking to review our practices and bring more training content that amplifies this message of diversity.

Over the last year, we have started to introduce wider learning opportunities to our members to help make yoga more inclusive through online Member Sessions led by Donna Noble and Josetta. Our programme for the next year also builds on this theme as well as exploring yoga's ancient cultural roots. You can discover who's joining us in 2024 on page 4.

I also wanted to congratulate one of our longest-standing members, Monica Burton, on her MBE. Her remarkable story is detailed page 5. Monica demonstrates unwavering dedication and passion in bringing yoga to people with complex health needs. She stands as a true example of care and a guiding light to us all.

Peter Tyldesley
BWY CEO



YOUR FREE LEARNING SESSIONS

Join us to explore on and off the mat, together

Continuing in our commitment to supporting learning and development during the current economic crisis, BWY's Members Sessions remain free to all members for 2024.

Non-members can join us for a small administration fee, although three sessions would more than cover the cost of one year's BWY membership.

Joining us this year are, from top row left: Roopa Pai, An Appreciation of the Yoga Sutras; Norman Blair, Yin Yoga Energy Channels and Accupressure Points; Theo Wildcroft, Post-lineage Yoga: from Ancient Wisdom Traditions to Modern Teaching Practices;



Anurada Choudry, Mantra and Connection of Sound to Chakras; Andrew McGonigle, Refining the Language of Teaching Yoga and Emma Slade, Incorporating Buddhism into your Yoga Practice and Life.

We begin the 2024 season with Andrew McGonigle, aka Dr Yogi. Andrew's Members Session will take place on 17 January from 7pm online.

See you at a Members Session soon.

REMEMBERED

We report the passing of Swami Pragyamurti Saraswati.

She was regarded as a strong and influential light in the development of yoga and its traditional teachings and techniques in the UK and Europe over the past 50 years. She will be deeply missed, touching the hearts and transforming the lives of many people she came into contact with through her dedication to her guru and her involvement with work in prisons, with people with HIV in the UK and South Africa, and her training of many yoga teachers in the UK. A regular teacher and participant at BWY's Congress over the years, Swami Pragyamurti Saraswati was well known and well regarded by many BWY members.

Swami Pragyamurti Saraswati
Leah Jane Caroline Garady
31.3.1941 – 11.8.2023

MONTHLY DD

As advised in the October On The Pulse, members may now opt to pay their membership in monthly instalments by direct debit.

Several members have already taken advantage of this offer but as 15 days are needed to process a request, it may be too late for this year for many of you.

However, you can still set up a direct debit now and we will change payments for subsequent years to a monthly payment.

If you do wish to pay by monthly direct debit (or by annual direct debit) simply email us at Accounts.

A direct debit sign up page will be offered from the website shortly.

For all Direct Debit inquiries E: accounts@bwy.org.uk

HONOURS FOR YOGA TEACHER MONICA, 'TRANSFORMING LIVES'

A BWY teacher and mentor, who has played a key role in bringing yoga to vulnerable people in the London area, has been awarded the British Empire Medal in the King's Birthday Honours list.

Monica Burton, an 88-year-old former nurse living in Harrow is honoured for going above and beyond in helping disadvantaged people in the community regain a good quality of life through yoga.

Monica received notification of her British Empire Medal in May and will be formally awarded at a ceremony at the Tower of London on 3 November.



'I am delighted and humbled to receive this award,' said Monica. 'This recognition serves as a powerful testament to the benefits of yoga and its potential to create positive change in the world.'

Monica's passion for yoga started in the early 1970s when she saw yoga on TV. After three years of waiting to get into a yoga class, she enrolled in a yoga programme in Harrow which would change her life.

Having moved to Eastham from Jamaica to pursue a nursing career in 1953, Monica originally specialised in cancer care, influenced by the pioneering

cancer treatment at the Mount Vernon Hospital in Middlesex. Starting her career at Eastham Memorial Hospital, Monica changed her specialty to geriatric care after having her first child so she could work closer to home.

In 1982, Monica started her BWY Yoga Teacher Training in Middlesex with Janet Southall. Monica said that Janet, also a former nurse, was a strict teacher and her classes adhered to a specific dress code of leotards and black tights, an exercise class norm of that era. The two-year course helped build her confidence to start her own classes at the hospital where she worked.

Monica said: 'The course gave me a great foundation so that I could offer remedial yoga classes at the hospital and set up my own private practice. After successfully treating one client via GP referral, I never needed to advertise again as I had a constant stream of recommendations.'

A qualification in teaching adult education was followed by Monica becoming a registered psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. This was to complement her yoga work and help her to take the next step to mentor others. In 1986 Monica qualified as a Diploma Course Tutor.

As her local reputation grew, Brent Council recognised how Monica's talents could be used within its day centres for people with additional needs. The council piloted yoga at its main day centre – Strathcona – for three months. According to Monica, the day centre workers were astonished when a girl with cerebral ataxia which includes symptoms such as shaking, was able to lie still on her back for five minutes. Following the success of the pilot, Brent Council introduced yoga to all its day centres.

Monica said: 'Working with people with complex needs meant that I often had to think creatively. Yoga was a great way to help people "feel" when they didn't have other functional senses. It gave me a wealth of experience that I could draw on.'

YOGA IN ACTION: ENVIRONMENT, EQUITY AND COMMUNITY

The BWY is a charity dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of yoga and its safe practice through experience, education, study and training. Our goal is to remove barriers so everyone can enjoy yoga and its power to improve our lives and the environment around us.

Last year we began our environment mission, piloting tree-planting and beach cleaning projects around Britain. Now we're expanding that project and beginning others. We are also working to champion equity in yoga and community yoga.

The recipient of this year's Community category in our Heart of Yoga Awards Davy Jones, is helping BWY develop this goal. You can read more about Davy's generous support of our ambitions on page 7.

If you'd like to get involved to help give something back to the planet, you can volunteer to help a great cause near you.

Following the success of our 'For the love of trees' campaign last year, we are now working in partnership with local environmental charities across the UK to make it bigger and better.

From tree-planting and rewilding projects, the list of events will evolve to include beach and river cleans. We would love you to join other BWY members to get involved. Please find more details on our website.

Don't forget to tag us, @britishwheelofyoga, sharing pictures from any events that you attend.

Yoga in Action can be in the smallest moments

– saying 'good morning' to those we pass by in the street, waving to a driver and stopping a bus from leaving the bus stop for a would be passenger, who is sprinting for the door but is just out of the driver's sight-line...



If you're looking for inspiration, turn to page 30 for more inspiration, to bring Yoga in Action into the every day.

And if you have more ideas to share, please message us via our social media accounts or email us at E: communications@bwy.org.uk

SHARE YOUR WISDOM, SHAPE OUR FUTURE

In October's On The Pulse we asked members to help us shape BWY's future as part of the BWY's Strategic Plan consultation process.

Thank you to those who have already sent in your online questionnaire.

If you missed sending in yours, there is still time. The link is in your October OTP. We greatly value members' feedback. Please help us build a better BWY for you.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH YOGA



We introduced our Heart of Yoga award winners at this year's Annual General Meeting, including the Community Champion of the Year. Davy Jones of Brighton Yoga Foundation (BYF) won the award for BYF's work taking yoga to those who do not normally have access to it. Davy's inspiring acceptance speech explaining this work is reprinted below.

First of all I'd like to thank the hundreds of yoga teachers who have been quietly doing yoga outreach work for years in their local communities long before Brighton Yoga Foundation was created, and who sought no awards or recognition for their work: they just felt it was the right thing to do to take yoga to those who need it the most.

I'd also like to thank my wife who helped me set up the Brighton Yoga Festival and Foundation, who encouraged me to become a yoga teacher but who's a far better teacher than I'll ever be. Thanks too to all those who have supported our Festival and Foundation – our teachers, funders, supporters, part-time staff and trustees. Since 2016 we have raised over £110,000 for our community outreach work and organised hundreds of free classes for those in need. Currently we are running 10 classes a week – including at the Mental Health hospital, Lewes Prison, chair yoga for chronic back pain, a class for women of colour, and therapeutic yoga for women recovering from domestic abuse and sexual violence. The feedback from the classes is so good, it is almost as if we have written it ourselves. Twice in the last few months, participants have written to us to say: “Your class has literally saved my life”.

Just like those early pioneers of yoga outreach, we know that yoga is a wonderful gift and we are

grateful for the benefits it has brought us. But we also know that those who would benefit the most from yoga often have no idea about the benefits it could bring them. They don't think yoga is for people like them and they often can't afford it. That's why we want to “give back” to support those people to get access to yoga.

As the challenges facing humanity multiply – climate change, inequality, post-Covid mental and physical health problems - so the academic and medical evidence of the benefits of yoga to help meet those challenges also multiplies.

But yoga is now a multi-billion pound business with large corporations looking to cash in. Increasingly these chains of studios, with poorly trained teachers and short gym-style classes aimed at the Instagram market, treat the values of yoga, its teachers and students as mere cogs in a money-making machine. Elites enrich themselves while many yoga teachers struggle to survive, with some pay rates lower than 20 years ago.

It's maybe an over-simplification but there are two broad trends in the yoga movement – those seeking solely to make a profit from its more affluent participants, and those who seek to make yoga more accessible to those who need it most. I'm glad that the British Wheel of Yoga, the IWGB Yoga teachers union and the Brighton Yoga Foundation are all firmly in the latter camp. Thank you for this award.

BWY is keen to develop more community outreach work. Davy will be helping us run a feature in each of our next two issues of Spectrum on community outreach yoga. We know many yoga teachers already undertake similar work. Whether it is BWY members or other yoga teachers or studios that are taking yoga beyond the existing yoga community to those who would benefit from it the most, we want to hear from you! Please contact us at communications@bwy.org.uk.

Of course, every area has its unique characteristics and there is no blueprint for developing this work. Davy is happy to talk to you. Contact Davy at davyyogafoundation@gmail.com

NEW ANATOMY MODULE

A diagnosis of scoliosis as a teenager helped inspire Julie Pons Woods' fascination with intelligent movement. Now her 60-hour module Embodied Anatomy is on its BWY pilot run, launching in January

I have always been fascinated by the body. Its lines, its features, the postures one can get into just by habit. I used to love the external appearance of bodies. As I grow old, I love to listen to inside the body. The murmurs, flutter, its tingle and flushes... they are lovely music to my ears. Most of us in the western world are not really connected with our bodies. But as yoga practitioners and teachers, we share our love of that connection of mind, body, emotions and spirit.

I remember being a little girl and practising karate and running cross country races... then, at some point, when I was 13, I was diagnosed with scoliosis and I was suddenly forbidden to run, do any weight bearing activity or attend sport classes at school, sentenced to end up in a wheelchair at 50 years old. If doctors, back in those days, knew better, they would have encouraged me to move intelligently, to connect with my body, to love my spirals and to accept myself as I was designed.

Thankfully, I met fantastic physios in my 20s and life brought me to India for work from 2008 till 2010 where I discovered yoga.

Yoga allowed me to improve my posture and tackle my back pain. The first eight years of my practice were orientated towards the physical body. During that stage I became fascinated by anatomy and I began my journey with Blandine Calais Germain in France, Thomas Myers and Leslie Kaminoff in the US. Knowing the different names of the structures was like charting an unknown territory. I started to create maps of the body in my mind, and the more I learned, the more I was adding to those maps, getting deeper and deeper into the complex realm of the body. The more complex the maps became, the

more I started to put them into question and create new ones again and again...

Certainly, deepening my empirical knowledge of the body with personalities like Gil Hedley, Todd Garcia, Robert Schleip, Julian Baker, and Jaap Van Der Wall, helped me reconfiguring the maps I first learned and extend my comprehension of the body in a much wider, connective, bio-tensengral and integrative way. Over the past seven years, the relationship with my breath, my fascial net, my neuro-vascular bundles have really evolved. I am passionate about what makes us human, both physically and spiritually.

I am now offering the embodied anatomy course I developed as a BWY module. This course is open to teachers who have at least two years of practice as a yoga teacher, because you need a little bit of experience under your belt to see different bodies and start to ask yourself questions about what is functionally viable in a yoga class. The course will allow you to dive into the different body structures and what connects them. We will look at those structures from a functional point of view, but also from an integral anatomy perspective. This will help you analyse what your students are doing in a holistic way, instead of just looking at body parts.

For those 60hrs, you will need to be present at all modules, because the course is about building a sangha of the anatomy-curious, who want to exchange views, experiences, share their knowledge. You will learn with me and I will learn from you.

Embodied Anatomy starts 4 January 2024
Last date to book on is 25 December 2023.
E: movementanatomydevelopment@gmail.com

DCT TRAINING MOVES ONLINE



If the travel and costs involved in residential training have put you off taking your teaching career to the next level, you can now train to become a Diploma Course Tutor online.

The new online training course has been successfully piloted over the last year and has received very positive feedback from current trainees. The course, developed by Terri Hilder, blends online and distance learning to allow trainees to fit the work around their other commitments.

Invitations to apply for the new online DCT Training course will be sent out in 2024 to those who have already registered their interest with the central office team. If you are a CPD or Foundation Course Tutor and would like to progress your career, please contact the central office team now:
E: office@bwy.org.uk to register your interest.

Eligible applicants will be invited to an introductory day to meet the course tutors and get a flavour of what the course involves. Rather than meeting twice a year as part of a residential programme, meetings now take place monthly for just four hours via Zoom and fuse tutor-led content, small group work and

interactive peer discussion. The course enables teacher trainers to successfully prepare for and deliver a BWYQ Level 4 teaching qualification.

According to Belinda Emberson, the DCT Training Officer: 'Online training provides a unique opportunity for applicants across the country to apply without the constraints of time-consuming and costly commutes. It also encourages enhanced tutor-led support through monthly online meetings for a more interactive learning environment.'

Trainee feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. 'Zoom has allowed us to meet monthly from all parts of the UK. We have learnt not only to impart the responsibilities of a yoga teacher to trainee teachers, but the responsibility we hold as DCTs to ensure we offer a course that allows trainee teachers to grow as individuals and become confident yoga teachers.' Donna Negus from Essex.

'The training is well structured and practical in terms of covering all aspects of the syllabus we will be going on to teach (both the Certificate and the Diploma). The online format works well for me, meaning less travelling and meeting more regularly. I feel my teaching has evolved through the elements of the course we are covering, so lots of personal growth too.' Anna Knowles from Aldershot.

'The monthly Zoom sessions are always interesting and interactive with a well-considered mix of presentations, discussions and small group work. The tutors are knowledgeable and experienced and the monthly sessions and regular written assignments always feel purposeful and relevant.' Brenda Ward from Lancashire.

'It makes life a lot easier for me being able to see the children off to school and then make myself a coffee and log on rather than organise life for a weekend away.

• continued on page 11

TRAINING

BWY YTT, FOUNDATIONS, AND MODULES

BWYQ Yoga Teacher Training

12 November
Progression to Diploma in
Teaching Yoga with Kari Knight
Online

7 January
Progression to Diploma in
Teaching Yoga with Laura Le
Feuvre
London, TW1 4RF

14 January
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Catherine Eastwood
Huddersfield, HD3 3JP

21 January
Progression to Diploma in
Teaching Yoga with Hayley Giles
Wimborne, BH21 1EB

3 February
Certificate in Teaching Yoga with
Sunnah Rose
North London, EN5 4BW

16 March
Certificate in Teaching Yoga with
Tiffany Thorne
Cambridge, CB4 3DX

6 April
Diploma/Certificate in Teaching
Yoga with Perry Lewis and Dawn
Wesselby
Leicestershire, LE17 4JX

6 April
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Jacqueline Gunnion
County Durham, DH8 9RE

11 May
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Donna Negus,
Romford, RM2 6EJ

1 September
Certificate in Teaching Yoga with
Anna Knowles and Lucie Landau
East Sussex, TN32 5ET

1 September
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Clare Gibson
Surrey, KT10 8LF

7 September
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Brenda Ward
Lytham St Annes, FY8 5JY

22 September
Diploma in Teaching Yoga with
Audrey Blow and Diana O'Reilly
Swansea Wellbeing Centre, SA1 5PQ

29 September
Certificate in Teaching Yoga with
Roberta Jesson
Oxford, OX2 7BY

Foundation 1

13 January
With Kate Plummer. Online

17 March
With Janice Procter
Cambridgeshire, PE28 5NU

6 April
With Bindie Edwards
Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7AR

6 June
With Nikki Tuke
Brighton, BN2 9RH

Foundation 2

28 October
With Cora Kemball-Cook and Lina
Newstead
Canterbury, CT2 8NH

1 January
With Lesley Isaacson and Pauline
Fleming
London, NW1 4NU

FOUNDATION OF JOY



Celebrating Foundation Course 1 success, from top left: Cindy Carlton (TA), Sally Ward, Kelly Newman, Sarah Bolton, Patricia Foley, Nadya Shyra, Sam Hornsey, Dido Reynolds, Ray Hook, Heidi Rawal, Rachel Peck, Steve Lightbody, Rachal Stonehouse, Ananda FCT Frederica Jones, Julia Spargo, Anne-Marie Everett, Hansa Menzies and Vicky Sweeney

Modules

28 October
Restorative Yoga with Carol Trevor
Online

2 November
Menopause Yoga with Petra
Coveney. Online

8 November
Yoga Therapy for Chronic Pain with
Nikki Jackson and Vicky Arundel
Online

9 November
Yoga for Back Care with Anji Gopal
Online

5 January
Embodied Anatomy with Julie
Pons Woods. Online

13 January
Beginning your Ayurveda Journey
with Brenda Ward
Lytham, FY8 5JY

28 January
Teaching Yoga in Prison
Foundation with Selina Sasse,
Victoria Green and Chris Holt
Oxford, OX2 7HF

16 March
Pregnancy Yoga with Judy
Cameron
Edinburgh, EH7 5LH

23 March
Ayurveda in Action with Tarik
Dervish and Cathy Mae Karelse
Online

23 March
Foundations in Yoga Therapy with
Nikki Jackson
Online and West Oxfordshire,
OX7 3NX

20 September
Teaching Yoga in Prison Intensive
Selina Sasse, Victoria Green and
Chris Holt
Wantage, OX12 0EJ

21 September
How Can Somatics Influence
Our Yoga Practice? With Debby
Wilkinson
Devizes, SN10 2LT

Approved Training Organisations

Adamo School of Yoga
adamoyoga.co.uk

Intelligent Yoga Teacher Training
07747 196914
IntelligentYogaTeacherTraining.co.uk

Mindflowyoga
mindflowyoga.com
contact@mindflowyoga.com

Shiatsu College
info@meridianyoga.co.uk
meridianyoga.co.uk

Teach Yoga
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The Yoga Academy
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theyogaacademy.org.uk

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Yoga Satsanga Ashram
01437 562200
www.yogasatsanga.org

Yoga Wise
emma@yoga-wise.co.uk
www.yoga-wise.co.uk

For info on Accredited Training
Organisations
contact: AGLO@bwy.org.uk

BWY Teacher Training

A full list of upcoming BWYQ courses
can be found on the BWY website at
W: bwy.org.uk/training

Module Tutors

A full list of BWY Module Tutors
can be found on the BWY website
at www.bwy.org.uk/specialist-list

CDP listings

For CPD in your region, turn to our
Regions' pages from page 36
Full listings are on the website.

NEW DCTS FOR YOU

• *continued from page 9*

I've really enjoyed the learning
so far and Belinda and Terri cover
a lot in those four hours so it's a
really efficient use of time." Alex
Yates from London.

'The DCT training has been
amazing for me and developed
my ideas on teaching way beyond
my expectations. The meetings
are fun, engaging and challenging,
and the online delivery is teaching
us all to offer blended learning
which has become an educational
reality since the pandemic.' Tiffany
Thorne from Cambridge.
'I'm finding the course brilliant

in helping me build a framework
to deliver the key tools necessary
to help student teachers become
confident, competent and
inspirational yoga teachers.' Perry
Lewis from Leicester.

Want to start your teaching journey?

Tiffany Thorne, Perry
Lewis, Dawn Wesselby, Jaqueline
Gunnion, Donna Negus, Anna
Knowles, Lucie Landau, Diana
O'Reilly and Brenda Ward have
courses recruiting now – and
featured in our listings above. The
remaining seven newly qualified
DCTs will be advertising their
courses shortly.

PELVIC POWER

EIGHT POSES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PELVIC FLOOR AND CORE

by Wendy Teasdill

Have you ever taken part in a yoga class, gone for a run or completed a workout and felt a little bit of pee come out? If so, it may be down to having a weak pelvic floor.

Bladder weakness can affect both women and men, but it is more common for women following childbirth and through periods of hormonal change. However, men can also suffer from it too, as it weakens with age and can be brought under significant stress from high-impact activities and through poor diet and lifestyle.

Despite bladder weakness affecting some 14 million people in the UK, many people don't know where the pelvic floor is or how to strengthen it.

The pelvic floor

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles, ligaments, and tissues that form a supportive hammock-like structure or diaphragm at the bottom of the pelvis. Shaped like a basket, it supports the pelvic organs: the bladder, uterus and rectum, helping to maintain their position and prevent them from descending or prolapsing.

As well as maintaining urinary continence, strong pelvic floor muscles are essential for providing stability and support to the pelvis, spine and hips, and work together with the core muscles to maintain good posture and body alignment. They are also essential for sexual health and function.

Pregnant women are far more likely to know of its existence as they are prone to 'frequency of micturition' or the need to pee more. Progesterone – the hormone which helps maintain the pregnancy – also softens all the smooth muscles of the body – including the bladder. When the baby's head moves



down in the pelvis at the end of the third trimester, frequent trips to the loo can become the norm!

And then there's the birth process, which places tremendous stress on the pelvic floor muscles; if the second, or 'pushing' stage is protracted, or there's intervention such as forceps or ventouse, the pelvic floor will be very sensitive post-partum. Even if the birth is straightforward, the postnatal pelvic floor is never the same: the nerve endings in the pubococcygeal muscle - which are designed to rebound after birth - can be affected, and may require a certain amount of re-training.

Problems such as urinary and faecal incontinence, flatulence and prolapse – where the womb/bladder and/or the rectum descend – can cause a range of discomforts often too embarrassing to discuss over coffee.

Men and women who haven't had babies are not immune to pelvic floor dysfunction. A poor diet can cause constipation due to the stress put on the pelvic floor through constant straining, and the hormonal changes of menopause cause oestrogen levels to decline, which increases slackness and the possibility of prolapse.

How to strengthen your pelvic floor

The good news is there are exercises that can help. When we work the muscles of the pelvic floor we augment the blood flow to the region and develop strength, flexibility and familiarity. Here are five of the best yoga exercises to help strengthen your pelvic floor.

1. Mula bandha or root lock

In the book, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika we learn of Mula bandha, the 'root-lock', by which the energy flow is reversed and inner strength is developed by the practice of drawing the pelvic muscles in and up. Mula bandha is said to increase inner strength, vision, autonomy and self-reliance.

We can do Mula Bandha whilst sitting or integrate it with asana practice. It involves drawing the muscles linking the tailbone to the pubic bone inwards and upwards on an exhalation, and relaxing them on the inhalation. The relaxation is as important as the engagement, as this lends flexibility. When we draw the main muscles inwards and upwards we cause an upward cascade, in which the sphincter muscles of the anus, vagina and urethra follow suit, causing the inner muscles of the pelvis to lift.

2. Adho Mukha Svanasana or Downward-Facing Dog

Inverted postures like Downward Facing Dog take the pressure off the pelvic floor and encourage increased blood flow to the pelvic region. The pose actively engages the core muscles which can help engage the pelvic floor as part of the overall core activation.

- Come to all fours with the hands slightly ahead of the shoulders, knees under your hips.
- Tuck your toes under and, on the exhalation, press the underside of the toes firmly into the mat, lift your knees and draw the pelvis back from the shoulders, shoulders from the hands. Allow the legs to bend or straighten according to the spine. Press your palms firmly into the ground and actively push through your hands, creating space and length in your upper body.
- We borrow from the legs to give to the spine. With each exhalation, engage the pelvic floor and the core muscles.
- Maintain the engagement of your pelvic floor muscles as you continue to breathe deeply and evenly.
- With each exhalation, gently lift the pelvic floor muscles as if you were trying to stop the flow of urine or prevent passing gas.
- With each inhalation open the diaphragm.
- Feel the stretch through the back of your legs. Be kind to the hamstrings and only if they allow it, sink the heels towards the ground. However, remember that the main focus in this variation is on the pelvic floor rather than achieving the deepest stretch in the legs.
- Hold the pose for a few breaths, focusing on the engagement of your core and pelvic floor.
- To release, gently bend your knees and lower them back down to the ground, returning to the starting position on your hands and knees.



3. Dwi Pada Pitham or Bridge

This pose helps engage the pelvic floor muscles by lifting and stabilising the hips. This activation helps to strengthen the pelvic floor and improve its overall tone. As it involves hip extension, it stretches and opens the front of the hips which can relieve tension in the pelvic floor.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet hip-distance apart, flat on the ground. Your arms should be resting alongside your body, palms facing down.
- Ensure your feet are placed firmly on the mat, allowing your heels to be within reach of your fingertips.
- As you exhale, press your feet into the mat and lift your hips off the ground, gradually rolling up your spine.
- Engage your glutes, inner thighs, and pelvic floor muscles as you lift your hips higher. With each exhalation, press the soles of the feet evenly and firmly into the mat and feel the rebound up from the earth feeding the pelvic floor strength. Keep your thighs parallel to each other and your knees directly over your ankles. (Hot tip: placing a small Pilates ball between the knees really helps amplify the sensation of the inner thighs and gets the pelvic floor muscles working.)
- Breathe into the diaphragm, lengthening the distance between the diaphragm and pelvis.
- Hold the pose for a few breaths, maintaining the engagement of your pelvic floor muscles.
- Slowly lower your hips back down to the ground, articulating your spine one vertebra at a time.
- Repeat the pose for several rounds, gradually increasing the duration of the hold as you build strength and comfort in the posture.



4. Utkatasana or Chair

As you squat into the pose, the pelvic floor muscles activate to provide stability and support to the pelvis.

- Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart and arms relaxed at your sides.
- Inhale deeply, then exhale as you slowly bend your knees, as if sitting back into an imaginary chair. Keep your spine lengthened and your chest lifted.
- Raise your toes for a moment to check that the pelvis isn't coming too far forwards and overloading the knees. Returning the toes to the mat, press the base of the big toes down with each exhalation, feeling the upward-cascade. (Again, holding a Pilates ball between the knees to intensify the sensation).



- Engage your core muscles, including the pelvic floor, to stabilise your body and support the pose.
- Extend your arms forward, parallel to the ground, or bring your palms together at your heart centre.
- Keep your weight in your heels, ensuring that your knees are aligned with your toes and not extending beyond them.
- Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor, maintaining a slight posterior tilt of the pelvis to engage the pelvic floor muscles.
- Hold the pose for several breaths, maintaining the engagement of your core and pelvic floor.
- To release, inhale as you straighten your legs and return to a standing position.
- To develop this posture you could lift the heels and come up onto the balls of the feet. Use the arms to counterbalance the weight of the pelvis.

5. Vrksasana or Tree

Maintaining balance in tree pose challenges the pelvic floor muscles, as they help provide stability and control. Active engagement of the deep abdominal muscles helps stabilize the pelvis and strengthens the pelvic floor.

- Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart and arms relaxed at your sides.
- Shift your weight onto your left foot and find your balance.
- Lift your right foot off the ground, externally rotate the right hip and place the sole of the right foot against your left inner thigh (or calf – but not the knee).
- Find a focal point to gaze at, which helps with balance.
- Engage your core muscles, including the pelvic floor, to stabilise your body.
- Lengthen your spine, relax your shoulders, and breathe deeply.
- Take your arms into a position that encourages the breath to mould the pose for several breaths, maintaining the engagement of your core and pelvic floor.
- Release the pose by gently lowering your right foot to the ground and returning to a standing position.
- Repeat the pose on the other side, switching the placement of your feet.

Diastasis Recti

For postnatal women, simply working the pelvic floor muscles isn't enough. During pregnancy, it is not uncommon for the two main vertical muscles running down the front of the abdomen to split, due to the pressure of the baby. This is known as 'diastasis recti' or 'split abs.'

The two muscles are attached to a central aponeurosis – a sheath of connective tissue comprising of resilient bundles of connective tissues. If the connective tissue separates, the baby will have more room to expand, and, postnatally, the abs usually do come back together of their own accord. However, if the separation has been particularly stringent it could take years for the muscles to come back together.

1. DIY Rec-check

- Lie on your back with the knees bent, and feet in line with hips.
- Place a thumb in the abdominal mid-line and two fingers above the navel.
- Gently lift your head off the floor. This activates the abdominals.
- If there is no resistance under the thumb, there may well be some separation.

2. Curl ups

- Lie on your back with the knees bent, and feet in line with hips.
- Cross your arms and place your hand on the opposite sides of the abdomen.
- On an exhalation - simultaneously raise the head, look between the knees, and pull the two sides of the abdomen towards the centre.
- Repeat x 6.

3. Mula Bandha

Working the abs without using Mula Bandha could split the abdominals further and weaken the pelvic floor. It is recommended to repeat Mula Bandha ten times, three times a day.

Resources:

Continence problems in the UK are more common than you think (bbuk.org.uk)
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng210>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU9WVtURYRQ>
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/site-search?ss360Query=Pelvic+floor+>
<https://www.pelvicroar.org/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pelvic-organ-prolapse/>

THE ROYAL SEAL

HATHA YOGA REVERSE ENGINEERED

by Matt Gluck

The pinnacle of the various forms of yoga has been described as 'Samadhi' or absorption in deep peace, blissful ecstasy and freedom from the belief that we are just this body. It brings solace to hear that the 'path is the goal' (Chögyam Trungpa - Tibetan Buddhist Master), as it helps us to appreciate that each step of our journey plays a key role in leading us towards the pinnacle.

It is easy to become disillusioned on the journey, as I have been. While the ancient scriptures laud the myriad benefits of amrita (immortal liquid/ refined cerebrospinal fluid), after years of dedicated practice, I was yet to taste it.

Having come to yoga in 1972 to help relieve chronic asthma, I explored both Indian and Chinese yoga and martial arts to find healing and inner sanctuary. While the symptoms of my asthma greatly reduced over time, I still yearned for inner stillness. As a teacher, I often felt a bit hypocritical talking about how yoga can cease the citta vrittis when I hadn't yet experienced it myself. I often looked back to see if there was another path, sensing that perhaps there are many windy routes that don't all reach the same peak.

In 2012, upon the activation of Khecarī Mudrā, I felt a mental and physical ecstasy flood my being, affirming this practice was to be the main focus of my pursuits.

Over the past 11 years there has been an unlocking of a deeper inner knowing, a still point or calm centre like the eye of a storm.

In Khecarī Mudrā, the tongue is placed against the roof of the mouth with its tip stretched back towards the nasal cavity. It is held for as long as possible. The positioning of the tongue helps to stimulate pressure points which can redirect the flow of prana. The practice is associated with the sixth chakra, also known as the 'third eye', which is said to enhance spiritual insight and awareness.

It is my belief that Khecarī Mudrā (the Space Moving Seal) although a manifestation of the natural ascension of kundalini energy, is a means through which not only can we potentially reverse the ageing process (so say the shastras) but also, unlearn and dissolve all projections of ourselves back into the whole. We come to being one with why the Siddhi yogis structured the route to the crown jewel in the way that they did.

Are you interested in delving deeper and enhancing both your practice and perspective? Join Matt for a day-long workshop on Khecarī Mudrā on Saturday 9 March 2024 in Chelmsford, CM3 3JD where he aims to demystify aspects of the Mudrā, enabling you to integrate it into your personal practice. The workshop is suitable for all teachers as it is a more advanced practice. Please be assured that there will not be any severing of the frenum beneath the tongue in this workshop.

For further details, contact Matt directly at
E: matt@parasanayoga.com

MANTRA

ITS USE IN A YOGA THERAPY HEALING JOURNEY

Insights from Western psychology and neuroscience on trauma have become increasingly recognised in our world of yoga. Integrating what appear to be new discoveries into the ancient practices of yoga often reveals hitherto unexplored parallels and opens out new depths of understanding of what our yoga practice is ultimately all about. It offers the healing journey from trauma to gentle reintegration and connection; a journey we all share in varying degrees of intensity as life presents us with events and experiences that challenge our quest for connection, belonging and authenticity. The ancient Vedic chant Āyur Mantraḥ can be read to poetically describe this journey.

by Sabine Dahn



Trauma can and does happen in varying degrees to all of us.

It may occur at a time in our lives when our cognitive faculties are already developed, and we then have an active memory of the event. It can equally occur long before, and consequently our minds are not able to recall such events.

Like all experience, trauma is held in our bodies and when not addressed and released can manifest in a general sense of 'feeling trapped inside of ourselves', in an inability to express ourselves, unpredictable emotions and mood swings, strained relationships and a general sense of finding it difficult to manage everyday life situations. It can manifest more intensely as hypervigilance, disengagement, fragmentation and dissociation. According to Gabor Mate, the root of many mental health issues can be found in trauma. Physical symptoms such as fatigue, pain, nausea and others that don't seem to have any obvious physical cause and don't respond to physical interventions may also find their origin in trauma. Conventionally, symptoms are categorized as pathology and strategies are devised to eliminate the symptoms.

Alternatively, we can choose to look at symptoms as spontaneous responses to manage an unmanageable situation, as attempts to keep ourselves 'safe'. When an event is overwhelming and a person has no mechanisms in place to hold and manage this overwhelm, then dissociating, disengaging and splitting off may, at least

Āyurmantrah from the Taittirīya Āranyaka IV.2

om āyurdhehi	May my life be nourished.
om prāṇam dhehi	May the upward moving energy be nourished.
om apānam dhehi	May the downward moving energy be nourished.
om vyānam dhehi	May the circulating energy be nourished.
om cakṣurdhehi	May my sight be nourished.
om śrotram dhehi	May my hearing be nourished.
om mano dhehi	May my mind be nourished.
om vācam dhehi	May my speech be nourished.
om ātmānam dhehi	May my soul be nourished.
om pratiṣṭhām dhehi	May I rest in that nourishment.
om mām dhehi	May I be nourished.
om mayi dhehi	May that nourishment bring pleasure to others.

temporarily, be an effective coping mechanism.

Rather than presenting pathology, the response of the individual may then demonstrate an effectively healthy response to an unhealthy environment, given that at the time, no other, perhaps more constructive solution, was at their disposal.

Stephen Porges defines trauma as a 'chronic disruption of connectedness.' In his Polyvagal Theory he outlines the role of the vagus nerve for our sense of safety. When we are feeling socially engaged, safe and calm the ventral vagus nerve, which is linked to our parasympathetic nervous system, is online and all is well. The subdiaphragmatic dorsal vagus nerve, is linked to the sympathetic nervous system, our survival instinct and hard-wired defence mechanisms. As soon as we feel under any kind of threat, physical or emotional, the sympathetic nervous system becomes activated, and a cascade of defense mechanisms is set in motion.

Under threat, our first concern is to re-establish vital connection. We connect to other human beings via our social engagement system linked to the ventral vagus nerve which innervates our face, throat, voice box, larynx, middle ear, heart and

lungs including five cranial nerves. These five cranial nerves, all of which originate in the brainstem, play a major part in guiding us in orientation (head and neck movements), communication (voice), and facial expression (eyes). When trying to re-establish connection we search for soft, kind eyes and a calming voice. In the absence of these, our sympathetic nervous system will try and protect through action: the well-known flight or fight response. In a scenario where this active mobilisation is impossible, i.e. we cannot get out of the situation at hand, our 'protection through disappearance' response comes online: we freeze, pretending we are not there. All of this is hard-wired into our nervous system and runs through us at lightning speed.

When a past event remains unresolved, it continues to live in our bodies and as such is still part of our present. We often don't know what happened to us, and frequently it will not have happened intentionally. Parents may have experienced adverse events, and never had the chance to resolve their depression, anger, anxiety or grief. The emotional state of the care-givers, conscious or unconscious, will transmit to the child. It may affect us to such an extent that coping with everyday life may become

When a past event remains unresolved, it continues to live in our bodies and as such is still part of our present.

difficult, or it may simply and almost imperceptibly express itself in behaviour patterns that we might put down as our 'personality'. Unraveling these patterns can free up wider choices and more authentic expression. It is a lifetime's journey we all walk.

The Āyur mantraḥ can be read like a benediction, or prayer to journey well through life, recognising that life presents experience and we need to take good care that these experiences move through us so we may emerge as stable, well integrated human beings offering our gifts to the world for the benefit of all.

We keep the energies of our physical body (prāṇam,

apāṇam, vyāṇam) flowing freely through gentle movement, we keep connected to others through eye contact (cakṣur) and listening (śrotrām); feeling safe and connected enables us to think clearly (mano) and express ourselves (vācām); that way we grow into our authentic selves (ātmanām) and once we are firmly established in this authentic self (pratiṣṭhām), we can share our unique gifts confidently for the benefit of all. What we do not transform we will transmit, be that to the people who live alongside us or the generation after us.

A safe, supportive, and heart-centered space created through the essential nurturing elements of emotional and psychological safety, nonjudgmental, agenda-less presence, authentic kind eyes and a calm, soothing voice can all create conditions for a lifetime's healing and transformation. This environment may well be created by a skillful yoga therapist. Connecting deeply with each individual and applying the subtle tools of yoga that resonate with that person's heart space we can accompany and support.

Sabine Dahn is a BWY CPD teacher and has worked in yoga therapy since 2008. She currently offers a two-year Yoga Therapy Training programme with her colleague Barbara Dancer: www.yogatherapywholepersonhealing.com

Resources:

Āyur dhehi: You can listen to a beautiful recitation of the chant here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtyPRKJYnb4>

'The Wisdom of Trauma' (film), Gabor Mate

'The Myth of Normal', Gabor Mate

'The Body Awareness Workbook for Trauma', Julie Brown Yau

'Healing Developmental Trauma', Heller & La Pierre

'Polyvagal Theory & You', Stephen Porges

'Full Catastrophe Living', John Kabat-Zinn

'The Body Keeps the Score', Bessel van der Kolk

'Transforming Trauma', Dr James Gordon

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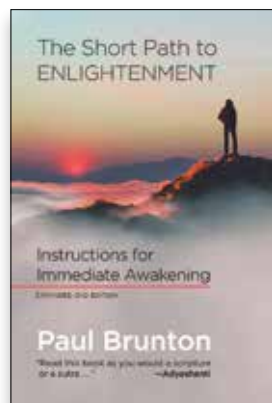
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YOGA AND CLIMATE ACTION: FINDING CONNECTIONS

by Helen Clay

Today, few dispute the evidence of human induced climate crisis, eco-destruction and fading biodiversity. Especially in the Global South, devastating floods, wildfires, droughts, soil degradation and erosion, crop failures, rising sea levels, habitat destruction, deforestation, species extinction, air and water pollution now threaten life and livelihoods. But despite warnings from the 1970s onwards inaction around targets and pledges continues. How then should we act?

During the International Day of Yoga, 2019, Amina Mohammed, United Nation's Deputy General Secretary, said: 'Yoga has a valuable contribution to make in addressing climate change, the defining issue of our time.'

But what sort of Yoga?

Yoga's early texts express the view that we and everything else in the natural world is fundamentally interconnected. Not separate from nature or having rights of domination and exploitation over it we are dependent upon her. The Vedic Pṛthivī Sūkta likens our relationship with the Earth to that between mother and children describing it as the sacred source, sustainer of life and something to protect and give gratitude to. Āsana names like Mountain and Tree postures, and the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā's Cow-face, Crow, Tortoise, Peacock and Lion poses reflect such connection with nature. This provides some basis for ecological awareness and action.

However, today's yoga is influenced by other cultural norms and differs from its predecessors in significant ways: its narrow focus on individual health and well-being; the performance of āsana, over other aspects; its distance from the Indian cultural roots and religio-philosophical underpinnings that inform deeper meanings; and its commercialisation as a wellness commodity. These things obscure yoga's contribution to addressing climate change.

Might yoga's ancient texts help widen understandings and steer it beyond individual concerns towards a more socially engaged practice better able to address 21st century suffering and climate crisis? Below I suggest that the Bhagavadgītā (henceforth the Gītā) has much to offer.

The Gītā opens to find, the warrior, Arjuna, on the battlefield overcome by confusion and weakness of resolve. Feeling compassion for those he is about to slaughter (who include his own relatives and former teachers) he is paralysed by conflicting emotions. Seeing no good arising from the forthcoming battle, he cannot act. Setting his weapons down he asks his charioteer, Krishna (not yet revealed as the Supreme Lord) for help. A challenging dialogue follows about the nature of action, 'inaction', right action, and one's duties in the world.

Two important Indian concepts, dharma and karma, underpin this dialogue. Dharma, from the Sanskrit root √dhṛ, to 'hold', 'support' or 'endure', refers to 'that which holds things together', 'one's duty', and also the 'moral and cosmic good'. Karma, deriving from √kṛ to 'do', 'act' or 'make', refers to action and to laws of cause and effect whereby every action has a causal dimension and brings consequences. Here, every action, 'inaction' and even impulse, however

small, brings karmic repercussions that generate the world we know and experience at both individual and planetary levels. These shape us, our reality, that of others and also contribute to or detract from dharma.

In its time the Gītā critiqued those whose pathway to spiritual liberation involved withdrawing from social responsibilities in favour of ascetic practices: Not by avoiding actions does a person gain freedom from action (Verse 3.4).

It teaches that there can be no freedom from karmic consequences by 'abstention'; failure to act and decisions to 'not act', especially around injustices, can be powerful forms of action. It introduced 'Karmayoga', the yoga of action, a new and alternative path to liberation through active engagement with the world, rather than withdrawing from it. It defines yoga first, as 'equanimity' (samatvaṁ), second, as 'skilful action' (karmasu kauśalam) and third, as 'the destroyer of suffering'. Yoga is the means to purify lower selfish impulses and awaken heartfelt appreciation of suffering and compassion for the self and others. This provides the basis for the Gītā's ethics and Karmayoga's 'skilful action' in the world.

Here crucial distinction is made between actions and their intentions, the latter informing meaning and karmic repercussions. 'Skilful action' is 'desireless' (niśkāma-karma), never motivated by 'selfish desire' (kāma krodha) or personal gain, but by compassion for 'the welfare of the world' (loka-saṅgraham) [and] 'the welfare of all beings' (sarvabhūtatīta). Selfish desire needs restraint because, like a fire or an addiction, it is impossible to satisfy and burns stronger when fed:

All-consuming and greatly calamitous, know it to be the enemy in this world... Destroy the enemy... in the form of selfish desire, so difficult to overcome (Verses 3.37, 3.43).

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Today, as we face the human-caused threat to life on our planet we may, like Arjuna, feel overwhelmed by anger, grief, powerlessness, sadness, fear, doubt.

‘Selfish desire’ is ‘the enemy’ of human happiness, contentment and self-knowledge: without reality, without foundation, ... persons whose self is lost, having little discernment, Whose actions are cruel — they come forth into being as enemies of the world for its destruction. Resorting to insatiable desire... Due to bewilderment ... they proceed with impure resolve... Having gratification of selfish desires as one’s highest aim... convinced that “this is all there is” ...With the aim of indulging in desires —those persons seek the accumulation of wealth by unjust means... This belongs to me — even more wealth shall become mine (Verses 16.8-13).

This provides a chilling, prescient critique of today’s global capitalism that prioritises endless growth and short-term profit over people and planet. This system and its toxic ideology of competitive individualism and self-interest has fuelled unnecessary, unsustainable consumption, driving selfish desire into a blaze that now quite literally burns the earth.

Through pausing for reflection and dialogue and through Krishna’s love and compassion, Arjuna develops a wider view of reality, of time and of himself. Seeing with ‘new eyes’ he works through his emotional dilemmas and clarifies his duty. No longer doubtful or shrinking from action, with courage renewed he rises to the challenge and re-joins battle to restore dharma, acting not for reward or success but purely because it is ‘the right thing to do.’

But none of this is easy. Today, as we face the human-caused threat to life on our planet we may, like Arjuna, feel overwhelmed by anger, grief, powerlessness, sadness, fear, doubt. We may know things are bad but, in an emotional dilemma, prefer not to look. Not knowing how to act we may do nothing. But this is isolating and disempowering. As for Arjuna, Karmayoga provides a path of love and compassion for the self, others and the world that

can motivate and move us through incapacitating uncertainty, fear and grief towards ‘skilful action’. The Gītā teaches that this path is strengthened by a loving devotional relationship with a Higher Power that brings courage and an important sense of ‘belonging’ and connection to something bigger. For Arjuna this was Krishna, but, equally, it could be another Higher Power, including Nature, understood to be the earthly body of God.

Clearly different government policies and leadership are required to end the ‘unskilful’ human systems and actions that damage our planetary home. But change is also needed at ground level. The Gītā teaches that we all have some agency. Awareness that our actions, however big or small, have effects can build a sense of personal empowerment in the face of environmental crisis. The text can help us think through ‘How should I act?’ ‘What is my duty in this ecological crisis?’ ‘How might I extend ‘skilful action’ beyond the yoga-mat?’ Hope lies in the hands of individuals and the choices and changes they make; for example, to educate oneself about the environment or not, develop a simpler lifestyle or not, assess and reduce one’s personal and organisational carbon footprint, waste, and consumption or not, eat less dairy and meat or not, join with others in dialogue and action to conserve and restore nature or not.

As yoga matures outside of India the Gītā provides a ‘wake-up call’ to stop ‘business as usual’ so that we can face the situation together, consider the consequences of actions and inactions and move towards ‘skilful action’. This can help re-envision a Yoga, rooted and connected in traditional wisdom, yet adaptable, alive, and able to respond skilfully to twenty-first century planetary suffering. The Gītā has inspired many to radical social justice action, including Gandhi’s campaigns against British colonialism and today’s Indian environmental activists whose activism is an expression of divine love. Far from a turning away from the world, Yoga

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here cultivates the foundation of equanimity and compassion needed for social justice action.

The text has three key messages for yoga today. First, that inaction and avoidance of action around the environmental crisis amounts to a form of violence and abrogation of responsibility. Second, that at everyday level, small actions and conversations support environmental stewardship or not. Even against overwhelming odds, every action, however small, with the right intention, can lead to more skilful action on and for our shared planet. Third, it is time for dialogue, action, and research at local, national, and international levels within practitioner communities and Yoga teacher training to identify how Yoga can stretch from 'me' to 'we' and beyond individual health and wellbeing to action for planetary health and wellbeing. There are no easy answers, and in the end, it will probably come down to the intention, love, compassion, truthfulness, knowledge, and courage, in each human heart, empowering, transformational qualities that Yoga can awaken.

References: Schweig, Graham. M. (2010) Bhagavad Gītā: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song. New York: Harper Collins.

Helen Clay lives in Sheffield and has taught Iyengar yoga for more than 30 years alongside professional work and family responsibilities. In 2021 she completed a Master of Arts in Traditions Yoga and Meditation from the University of London and in 2022 gained the Yogic Studies Advanced Certificate. This article draws on her dissertation: Avoiding the 'highway to climate hell': lessons / perspectives from the Bhagavadgītā. Helen hopes articles like this, as well as other initiatives and workshops, will support the emergence of a Yoga and Climate Action Network for support, information, resources and sharing good practice. For queries and more information contact Helen Clay at: E: yogaclimateaction@gmail.com

FEATURES

NO MUD NO LOTUS

INCLUSIVE YOGA FOR THE TRANS AND NON-BINARY COMMUNITY

How many of us regularly and knowingly teach non-binary or transgender people? To what extent are we comfortable and confident in the yoga studio with the changing linguistic landscape around pronouns and gender identity? The BWY Yorkshire committee set about exploring the answers to these questions by inviting a non-binary yoga teacher, Mookaite Jasper, to one of their regular online Teachers' Discussion Groups.

Mookaite (they / them), 39, is based in Middlesbrough and set up Queer Yoga North CIC to create safer spaces in the North of England for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), queer, intersex, asexual people (LGBTQIA+). Their not-for-profit is a Community Interest Company with five directors and a team of volunteers who have come forward from the six Queer Yoga communities in Middlesbrough, Saltburn, Stockton, Leeds, York, and Durham.

'The LGBTQIA+ community is disproportionately affected by mental health issues and we all know how beneficial yoga can be for mental health,' says Mookaite. 'But coming into the body can be quite complex when the body itself is a site of conflict, so yoga can feel very vulnerable especially in a room of people who might not understand these complexities.'



'Our social enterprise is basically, at its core, about suicide prevention,' says Mookaite. 'We know how wonderful yoga can be for mental health but so many yoga classes are not LGBTQIA+ friendly. A lot of the people who come to our Queer Yoga classes have either had negative experiences in regular yoga classes or they fear not being accepted, being touched, being misgendered in a regular class. I personally have had my own fair share of bad experiences, so I know first-hand how it can feel to be alienated in this way.'

Mookaite is confident that all yoga classes can become LGBTQIA+ friendly spaces with more awareness and suggests some simple steps to start making all classes more inclusive:

- Introduce your own pronouns as you introduce your name at the start of class, e.g. 'Hi, I'm Michelle and my pronouns are she, her', in order to open space for

the new student to offer their pronouns if they want to.

- If you're teaching online, add pronouns on screen along with your name, e.g. David (he / him).
- Include space on your intake form for people to tell you their pronouns (but write the word 'optional' next to it). Mookaite is happy to share their form.
- If you accidentally misgender someone, don't pretend it didn't happen. Acknowledge the mistake, apologise, and correct yourself, whether that's in conversation or in writing in a chat box online.
- Offer people the chance to provide their pronouns in any kind of sharing circle with introductions, but make sure it's optional rather than required, because some people might be in the process of figuring out their gender identity and not ready to come out. As a model, at the start of the introductions, you could say something like, 'I'm Jenny and my pronouns are she, her. If you'd like to introduce your name, and pronouns if you feel comfortable doing so, that would be great.'
- Avoid gendered language, including words like 'guys'. Although the word 'guys' is often used to mean 'all people', it might feel triggering for some people.

- Make sure you always ask for consent before offering any kind of touch.

Some non-binary and trans people who are Assigned Female At Birth (AFAB) might choose to wear a binder, which flattens the chest to make the breasts less visible. It is not advisable to wear this for yoga since it can restrict movement and breath. It is also not advisable to tuck, for people who are Assigned Male At Birth (AMAB). Tucking is a way of hiding the penis and testicles, and both binding and tucking can help with combatting gender dysphoria.

People in the non-binary and trans community refer to feeling dysphoric when they experience the unease of their assigned gender not matching how they feel about their gender. For some trans or non-binary people, not tucking or taking off their binder in order to do yoga can leave them feeling extra vulnerable and exposed, which can create an extra hurdle to joining a regular yoga class.

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But Mookaite is hopeful that in the future, with more education on these issues, yoga classes around the UK can become more accessible to the trans and non-binary community. Their most positive experience of feeling accepted on a yoga teacher training course was during the BWY Gentle Years course, learning to teach chair yoga to older adults.

'The tutor Eve Douglas has been amazing,' says Mookaite. 'She admits that she's still getting to grips with the new language, but she tries her best and it's obvious she wants to be inclusive. We had a whole-group discussion around inclusive language generally, and Eve asked me if I wanted to add anything as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. She opened up that space but she was clear to stress that I didn't have to say anything if I didn't want to. It sounds simple, but it means a lot. It's that kind of acknowledgment that helps you feel seen and accepted.'

People who support the LGBTQIA+ community are often called 'allies'. Being an ally can simply be a case of:

- listening and reading about LGBTQIA+ issues to learn more
- sharing articles on social media to amplify marginalised voices
- making small changes, like adding space for people to share pronouns on health forms

Mookaite said: 'The first step is just to start the conversation and the next step in being an ally is taking action, which is exactly what Lucy Croucher and Catherine Eastwood, the facilitators of the BWY Yorkshire discussion, have done.'

Not only did they organise and facilitate the online discussion, they also went away after the event and changed their health questionnaires to include an option for people to share their pronouns.

Lucy said: 'I know that three of us changed our health questionnaires after the event and there might be others who were inspired to do that too. I also wrote to BWY Central Office to ask them to review the BWY health questionnaire in the context of being more inclusive, which is something they are looking at.'

Catherine is a BWY Diploma teacher and her next course starts in January 2024. Catherine said: 'I

would love the opportunity to welcome LGBTQIA+ students teachers onto my course.'

Find out more about Mookaite's classes at

W: www.queeryoganorth.com

They are also on Facebook at Queer Yoga North, or on

Instagram @queeryoganorth

They can be contacted by email at

E: mookaitejasper@gmail.com

Mookaite studied their 200 hours with Yogacampus in York, before going on to do their 40 hours Yin course with Norman Blair. They also trained in chair yoga both with the Accessible Yoga School, and the BWY Gentle Years course. Most recently, they enjoyed a Wheelchair Yoga



Masterclass with Allihopa Yoga. They were thrilled to meet Lucy Croucher and Catherine Eastwood in person at the BWY CPD day with Gary Carter in Harrogate.

Reference:

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-health>

[Accessed on 27th August 2023]

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/>

[Accessed on 27th August 2023]

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/lgbtqia-mental-health/>

[Accessed on 27th August 2023]

Yoga as a Trans Man: an account by JJ (he / him)

JJ attends one of the Queer Yoga North communities.

I don't think people quite realise how much is taken from you on a daily basis as a queer trans person.

Whether it's misgendering, transphobia against you, or reading another headline with a death or attack against our community from transphobes or UK government.

Even the other day, I'd had a joyous moment talking to young people I teach about my name change and that there would be further changes moving forward. The young people were on it straight away and were so celebratory.

Then walking home, two old men shouted loudly 'I thought THAT was a boy. What the f*** is that?' as two teenage boys laughed at this and me.

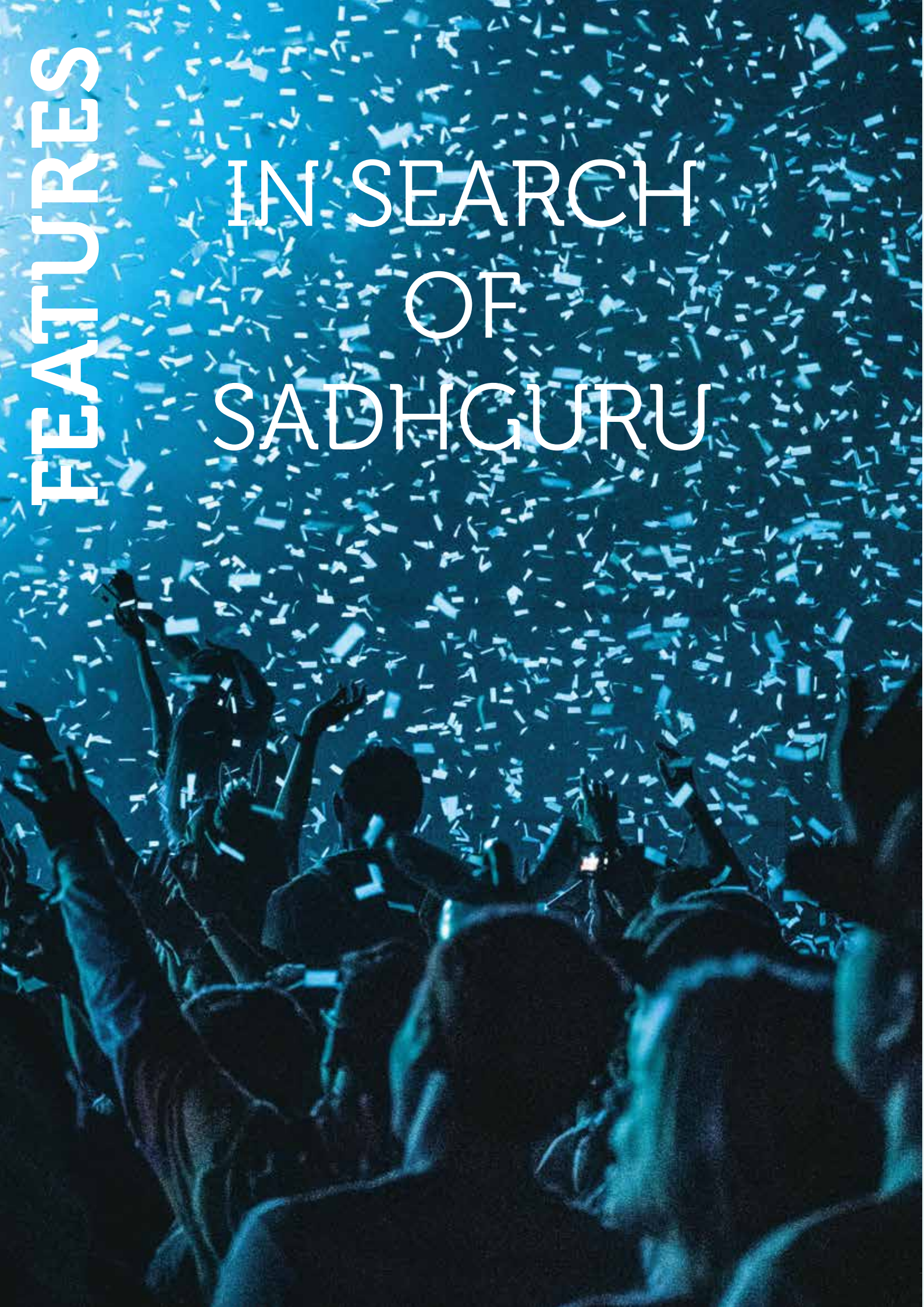
The day after, I entered Mookaite's Queer Yoga North session and spent an hour and a half in a queer and trans inclusive space, rejuvenating my mind and body with Mookaite's incredible queer-centred practice.

I haven't exercised publically in three years since I came out and having a LGBTQIA+ yoga space I can enter each month reminds myself that without mud there is no lotus. This is so utterly needed especially in regional spaces where bigotry takes centre stage.

I never thought I'd enter a yoga space without my binder, but Mookaite does a fantastic job of ensuring no-one feels dysphoric or othered.

In spaces like Mookaite's, we can exist with the grief and the joy. The necessity of this in further yoga settings is utterly vital.





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IN SEARCH OF SADHGURU

'Things will work out for the highest good! Whatever happens, it's for the highest good.'

Two young women in floaty, floral dresses and high-heeled espadrilles gallop past me. They are flustered, and their South London accents are punctuated with heavy breathing – it is one of the hottest days of the year so far, and we are making our way down the long, cavernous, glass-ceilinged central hallway of the ExCeL exhibition centre in London.

It sounds like one friend is trying to reassure the other (and herself) that they will reach their destination on time. It is my destination too, but these women appear to have come through the wrong entrance and not collected their entry wristbands yet. They are not alone – bar the handful of London ExCeL security personnel I can see, it appears it has been solely the responsibility of the Isha Foundation volunteers to shepherd and signpost thousands of attendees around the gargantuan venue – not an easy feat – and clearly some aspects were not working to plan.

Me and approximately 12,000 other visitors are cramming into London ExCeL to see Sadhguru. It is the first time in four years that the famous yogi has come to the UK – a flying visit, as afterwards he will be off to California for another event – such is the life of an in-demand mega-star.

You only need to search 'Sadhguru' on Google, social media, YouTube, or Amazon, and you will see the extraordinary size of his following. There is the same fervour around him as there is around Pope Francis, or Harry Styles – people want to be in Sadhguru's presence, to shake his hand, to hear his voice. And that is what we are all here for, thousands of us, to hear Sadhguru's words in real-time, to see him in the flesh... not just a token 'Instagram short' soundbite of wisdom. But for now, we're hanging out in Death Valley (aka the sweltering food-hall) waiting to be let into the main room.

I can't remember how we got talking, but I struck up a wonderful conversation with a smartly dressed woman next to me. Age 74 and from Mauritius, she has been following Sadhguru online for two years,

and as a gift, her London-based son had bought tickets for them to see the mystic together. I asked her why she likes Sadhguru, and her response is enthusiastic but also measured. She weighed up the pros and cons aloud – she liked his successful campaigning and fundraising for ecological initiatives. And she liked that he broached 'the deep stuff' with his affable, comical and easy-going attitude, all in a bid to lift the world's collective mental health. Although she qualified that she did not believe everything he said ('he has spouted some pseudoscientific nonsense'), she looked to her left and right and gestured to me with dainty open arms. 'He is an inspiration to all! You only have to look at the different ages and different cultures here,' she added. She's right – a demographic statistician would have a field day – there appears to be no single age, sex, race or nationality in the majority here. A true melting-pot.

Bolstered by our lovely chat, I decide to take the opportunity to play journalist and interview a few more people. I meet a group of punkish, pierced and impossibly fresh-faced girls from Finland who found Sadhguru three years ago, and have travelled here just for this event. Visiting London itself was a side note!

A sweet German woman, unnecessarily self-conscious about spoken English, travelled alone here. She has followed the guru for more than 10 years, having volunteered with his Isha Foundation many times in the past. She said his passion united people around important causes, and that he helped people see the whole picture. I sensed from other parts of our conversation that she worried deeply about the fate of our planet.

A beautiful middle-aged woman beamed a warm smile as I greeted her, and I compliment her on her bright purple sari. She said she felt over-dressed and assumed others would be wearing something similar. She is of South Asian descent, living on the outskirts of North London, and is an alumnus of the Inner Engineering course offered by Sadhguru. Her

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happy expression cracked a little as she told me she had faced terrible family problems since December, and Sadhguru's words have been of great comfort to her, and a guide on how to live life well. 'Nature makes me happy,' she said with glassy eyes.

We were interrupted by the clanking of a huge metal door being hoisted up. Swathes of tired, sweaty fans streamed into the cavernous room, me along with them. Everyone rushed to find their seats whilst savouring the welcome addition of air conditioning here. I found mine and another long wait stretched out ahead – it would be at least another hour before Sadhguru was due to take the stage that had been prepared and adorned, complete with a raised runway that cut down into the centre of the room.

I befriend the Mancunian couple next to me and I discovered they woke at dawn, drove four hours to get there, and were planning to drive back again as soon as the event was over. I spotted a striking painting of Shiva was the background image on the wife's phone.

To one side of the stage, a group of musicians and singers poured out with the most wonderful classical Indian music and songs. While flanking the stage, two huge screens had the portrait of a serene Sadhguru projected on them, accompanied by captions of his sage aphorisms – 'In, is the only way out' and 'break one limitation a day, eventually you will be liberated'. Now and then the musicians paused while a loud video montage of Sadhguru's benevolent and exciting exploits flashed onto the screens: his conservation work and SavetheSoil campaign, world leaders greeting him at embassy dinners and conferences, his famous motorbike journeys, encouraging the positive 'spirit of sport', playing football with young Indian children, sponsoring education, 'giving back' to the people of rural India,

and grand-scale elaborate consecration ceremonies that he leads, in front of thousands, at the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore.

Suddenly, the room bubbled with excitement and people were shuffling and rushing to their feet, desperately craning to see over and between heads... he had arrived.

A composed Sadhguru glided into the room in his classic yogi garb, palms together in gratitude, greeting the fans who have the prized front row 'donor' seats (those were £500 to £1,000 for that privilege). Secret-service style security guards lingered at the guru's side as he made a small circuit of the room and then to a chair by the main stage. A woman stood, giving a small introduction, and warned us, in no uncertain terms, that we must respect the presence of an 'enlightened being' and create a conducive ambience for him. We are duly encouraged to put phones on silent mode and 'no flash photography please'.

Before the main event, Sadhguru's daughter, Radhe, and her troupe, perform a mesmerising dance recital. We are told it is a showcase for Samskriti, a group funded by Sadhguru that aims to preserve and pass down traditional forms of Indian dance and martial arts that are slowly being forgotten.

After rapturous applause, the performers depart, the lights return to normal, and Sadhguru slowly and silently emerges onto the platform. There is a hushed reverence, but it is soon broken by a male fan taking the opportunity to call out, 'I LOVE YOU, SADHGURU!'

Quick as wink, Sadhguru turns towards the voice and gestures as if to tenderly clutch his heart, drawing a huge roar of laughter from the crowd. The ice is broken. All that heightened anticipation from the build-up has now melted away. Much like the Dalai Llama, Sadhguru is known for his humour, I guess it is what makes both men so disarming and approachable. Sadhguru then jokingly threatens to sit on his pedestal for the next five hours in total silence 'like a real yogi'.

But no, he insists the event be 'interactive', and urges the audience to literally elbow whoever is their neighbour, to jolt them awake if they dare nod off! An unlikely scenario thankfully, I imagine most people in there will be hanging on every word that followed...

Written by BWY Student Teacher Lydia Murray

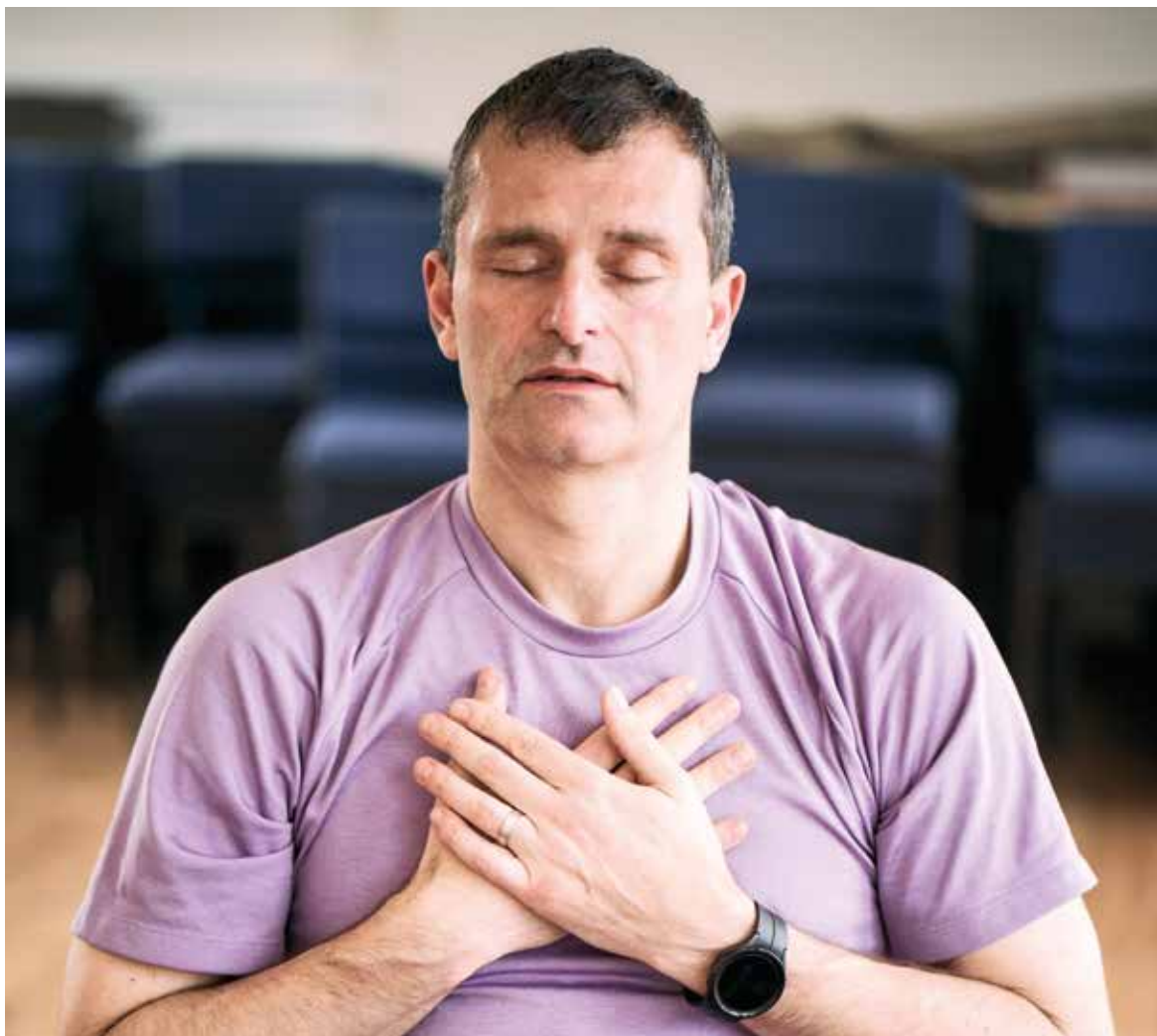
FIVE WAYS TO TAKE OUR YOGA OFF THE MAT

As BWY champions yoga off the mat with our
Yoga in Action projects, we ask members
how do you share your yoga heart with your communities?

Here yoga teacher Chloe Markham shares ways we can bring yoga spirit
in to our world in simple and effective ways that bring your yoga practice into
your everyday. If you're looking for inspiration; read on.

And if you have ideas to add, please share.

You can drop us a line at E: communications@bwy.org.uk



OK, I'll admit it. When I first started yoga, I was just there for the toning, the flexibility, and the strength I was promised would happen if I practiced my sun sals every day.

I wanted to look better, but running and burpees just weren't doing it for me.

So, after discovering yoga in some magazine or blog around 2007, I excitedly plopped myself onto my mat, found a teacher online I wasn't massively intimidated by, and started at the beginning.

Nearly 20 years later, and my life is 180-degrees different from back then. Sure, my body changed shape completely, I'm fitter, stronger, and more capable than I've ever been, and yes, my bread-and-butter is my online yoga studio, but my yoga practice changed the way I see and interact with the world around me. Put simply: it positively impacted every area of my life, not just my physical body.

And if you've ever been in a yoga class, you've

probably heard your teacher talking about this impact on your life; they talk about taking your practice with you, taking it off the mat, being a better person because of the time you've spent in class today.

But how do we actually do this? How can we find the biggest and most positive impacts from our yoga practice outside of the shiny purpose-built studio – or away from your fancy mat?

Here are my most-practised and impactful ways to bring your yoga into your day-to-day life, and see the life-changing effects in bigger ways:

1 Practice mindfulness

This is, quite literally, your yoga practice in miniature. Think of this as really noticing the temperature and texture of the water when you're washing your hands, or a moment to notice the tiny hairs in your nostrils moving with your breath. It doesn't always need to be a 15-minute meditation, or a full breath practice. Just close your eyes and

take a minute away from what you're doing. This resets your brain to a more sage-like state, allowing you to be present, calm, and grounded, even when life starts to get a little hectic.

2. Be nicer to yourself

Every yoga class should encourage you to feel capable, welcome, and supported. This is regardless of how many handstands you throw in, or how often you take a child's pose; regardless of your outfit, or how often you show up to practice. This is a huge mission to take with us into the rest of our lives. How can you show up for yourself more often in your life? Say nice things about yourself in the mirror, give yourself a high-five for a job well done (or for just making your bed in the morning), and wear your favourite outfit that makes you feel like a god(ess).

So often, the yoga world (and the world in general) can make us feel less-than. We're encouraged to dislike our appearance, we're told we're not good enough, rich enough, capable enough. But let this be a reminder that you, in fact, are enough, regardless. Practice this one regularly and often. And when we're kinder to ourselves, it's easier for us to be kinder to others, too.

3. Be nicer to others (especially the ones you hate)

Following on from the above, yoga teaches us to be kind. Always be kind. This is especially important when it comes to that guy who stole your parking spot, or the folks in the comment section of a divisive social post.

Everyone, as they say, is fighting a battle we know nothing about. Our yoga practice encourages compassion, so make a conscious effort to send some kindness into everyone you interact with. Bonus points for doing this when people do you wrong or make you mad.

4. Get into nature

Nature is one of the best tonics for life's ills, and one of my favourite ways to be more yogic in my every day.

This article on Mindfulness and Nature (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-018-0883-6>) tells us that 'a connection with nature is associated with greater life satisfaction, lower anxiety, improved vitality, meaningfulness, happiness, creativity, pro-

social behaviours, and pro-nature behaviours' – all huge aspects of our yoga practice.

Go for a walk, a surf, a paddle, or ride your bike through a forest. It really doesn't matter how we interact with our environment, but by doing so, we're better able to down-regulate our nervous system, find some perspective, and better deal with stress.

5. Journal

One of the best ways to process emotions, deal with the impact of our days, and understand how to move forward with tricky situations – all important outcomes of our yoga practice – is by writing it all down. This isn't something you'll show anyone, not something to be published, this is just getting words out to help you make sense of your head.

I usually journal for 500 words a day in my morning routine and, honestly, it's one of my favourite habits. It helps me be creative, process hard things, and even see emotions I didn't realise I had. It's another amazing tool to help us regulate our nervous system, ground, be present, and be more intuitive; all things our yoga practice encourages us to focus on.

I hope this inspires you to be more yogic outside of the confines of your mat. It really is a wonderful, life-changing practice, if only we allow it to permeate our world.

Chloe Markham is a yoga teacher and founder of the award-winning online yoga studio The Yoga Revolution. She thinks handstands are overrated and anyone can be a yogi.

W: theyogarevolution.co.uk/

Fb: @theyogarev Insta: @the.yoga.revolution/

THE 'I' OF THE STORM

Access Bliss and the Unitive State with Khecarī Mudrā



During this one-day workshop we will unpack the basic anatomy and physiology of the 'queen/king' of mudras. This practical session reveals how the 'space moving' seal uncovers your true nature, the deepest 'I'. An exploration day of Hatha and Taoist traditions.

Saturday 9 March 2024, 10am – 4pm
Boreham Village Hall, Chelmsford, CM3 3JD
Tickets £45

Contact: Matt Gluck, matt@pranasanayoga.com or
07974 340 685

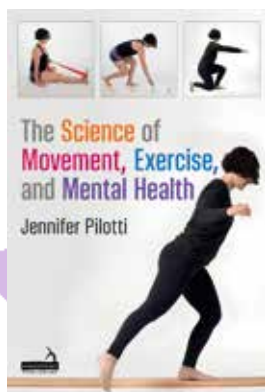
Movement and mental health

The science of movement, exercise and mental health by Jennifer Pilotti

Although this is not a 'yoga-specific' book, most yoga teachers will find it an inspiring and reassuring text as the author asserts the value of:

- Consistent practice
- Focus on practice (where exercise poses a distraction from thoughts and anxiety)
- Meeting people where they are - not where you think they should be
- The teacher as coach to enable students to feel safe
- Enabling embodiment.

Hence different words are used but the aims and values are similar. Jennifer focuses upon movement (



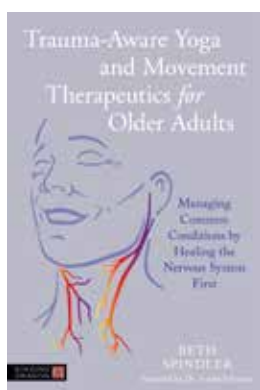
and this includes yoga, Tai chi, dance etc.) as a way to support positive mental health. In a time where people are experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety this is a valuable contribution to the literature as it explains in great detail the connection of movement and mental health. A well researched book, it is one which is factual but also practical with detailed photographs of exercise sequences to explore. Jennifer demonstrates a clear understanding of the need for an individualized approach to movement which appreciates the person's strengths and weaknesses and the particular issues they are experiencing. A good read for anyone, this text will be particularly insightful for yoga (and other movement) teachers, students and those supporting people with stress and anxiety in a holistic way.

Kate Lemon

Useful resource on yoga for older adults

Trauma-Aware Yoga and Movement Therapeutics for Older Adults by Beth Spindler. (Singing Dragon)

The sub-title for this book is Managing Common Conditions by Healing the Nervous System. Firstly, it offers practices for a range of issues that older people may be living with including: back pain, sciatica, trouble sleeping, prolonged sitting, arthritis, osteoporosis, pelvic floor weakness, healing after surgery, gut health and Parkinson's Disease. It also considers the needs of caregivers and subjects such as grief.



The author suggests that most people, and especially people who have been alive a long time, will have experienced some sort of trauma, so having a sensitive, trauma-aware approach to yoga is paramount for all teachers. She explains what's going on in our brains when we are stressed or traumatised including Polyvagal theory, a phrase you may have noticed growing in popularity in the yoga world recently. At the end of the book the author relates polyvagal theory to the gunas, which you may find useful. The book then goes through each of the ailments listed above to explain how they can be helped by yoga or movement therapy with reference to recent research and suggested practices. There are clear instructions and photos which are easy to follow. The practices have been carefully considered and there's an interesting range to choose from – largely but not entirely chair based, using common props, lying on the floor and using a wall for support. Towards the

end of the book the author describes the benefits of meditation practice on the brain and the importance of sitting well. Something we can all benefit from, young or old.

This book would be a useful resource for teachers of Gentle Years Yoga or Yoga Therapy, or for yoga students with a keen interest in research and personalised practice for their particular conditions. I will definitely be referring back to it for my teaching.

Alex Reed

South

welcoming a new team

We are delighted to introduce you to our new regional officer of the BWY South Committee – David Russell – who will play a pivotal role in enhancing our community and offerings moving forward.

David teaches yoga in Banbury, Oxfordshire and since qualifying with the BWY in 2005, he has had a long association with the Prison Phoenix Trust – taking yoga to prisons. His love of the natural world has inspired his involvement in running a local community group managing two miles of an ancient route – the Salt Way. He is also passionate about walking in Scotland and belongs to two local Nordic walking groups.

Said David: 'I am excited to help breathe new life into the South region and get CPD days up and running again. I believe that yoga is a good guide for leading a life of positive karma and I look forward to spreading its wisdom far and wide.'

Working alongside David, Hazel Faithfull joins the South team as Regional Training Officer. She previously served as Oxfordshire County Rep from 2009-2012. As a BWY and Foundation Course Tutor (FCT), Hazel brings a deep well of experience.

Lorna Chapman joins the committee as South Hampshire Area Rep. Lorna has been teaching in Hampshire since 2003 and is a certified BWY Teacher and FCT. She specialises in SUP (Stand Up Paddleboarding) during the summer months and she teaches a blend of Restorative yoga and Hatha yoga flow classes in the open-air and communal spaces in Winchester.

Working with Lorna, Brian Meredith will help plan events in Hampshire in his role as Isle of Wight Area Representative. He brings a wealth of yoga experience to us, having practised for more than 35 years has taught for 15 years, mainly on the Isle of Wight.

We still have vacancies, so if you can spare a few hours a week and are passionate about growing our community, we would love to hear from you.

Please email David at south.ro@bwyregions.org.uk

London

events, cpd and workshops

By the time this goes to print we will almost have finished our series of four fascinating philosophy workshops with Daniel Simpson, exploring what it means to be human.

Coming up on 18 November we have a Zoom workshop with Amelia Wood, considering power and agency in yoga communities and classes. She will present a history of abuses of power in yoga, covering cases from the 20th and 21st century, and consider how we can respond, as yoga teachers. Amelia will also talk about trends and models,



such as accessible and trauma-aware yoga. The workshop will include lecture, group discussion and some movement work. Cost: £35 members/ £40 non-members. Head over to the BWY website to book this, or one of our excellent First Aid days, and check out what we have lined up for the New Year.

Alex Yates,
London RO

London FCT and DCTs – would you like to become an integral part of the BWY London Committee?

As part of the BWY we need to pull together for our community. We are looking for a new RTO (Regional Training Officer) to organise the annual schedule of CPD events, Teachers Forums and special events in London. These events all have an educational focus, to enhance, build and support the skillset of our local teachers.

If this is your first time considering being part of the committee, please know that the London committee are wonderfully supportive. It is lovely to be part of

a team especially when our work as yoga teachers can be a solo affair. I shall be leaving the role in January so if you are interested, please do get in touch so we can discuss further. Rest assured there will be a full handover and you will be supported as you make your way into this rewarding and fulfilling role.

Laura Le Feuvre, BWY DCT and London RTO
E: london.rto@bwyregions.org.uk

Power and Agency in the Yoga Class and Community with Amelia Wood
18 November, 10am-4pm, Online

In this workshop we will consider power and agency in yoga communities and classes. Communities: in the first part of this workshop Amelia will present a history of abuses of power in yoga, covering cases from the 20th and 21st century, and offer a definition of spiritual abuse. How have yoga communities and the industry responded to abuse? What does justice and recovery look like in yoga following revelations of abuse? We will discuss our own networks of support, drawing from Theo Wildcroft's model of post-lineage yoga. Classes: in the second part we will consider how we can respond, as yoga teachers, in class contexts. How can we understand our power and hold space, authentically? Amelia will talk about trends and models, such as accessible and trauma-aware yoga. We discuss how we can integrate agency and consent into class contexts, how to apply these ideas in a practical way. The workshop will include lectures, group discussions and some movement.

Voice-work - Find Safety in the Strength of Your Voice and an Introduction to Emotional Freedom Technique (Tapping) with Kim Sheehan
21 January, 10am-2.30pm
Online

Do you feel that your voice lets you down when talking, teaching or chanting? Perhaps you think it's too high, too low, too weak or too loud or maybe you lack vocal confidence, projection, you use too much filler, you stumble over your words or you find Sanskrit words a challenge? This taster class will teach you the fundamentals of vocal projection and confidence in speech and chant, in a fun and curious way, You'll also learn the tapping points and then take part in a deep, yet fun tapping session that will help you to acknowledge and release stuck emotions that may be holding you back in your self-practice or teaching.

North

waiting list only

Find Your Inner Warrior with Virabhadrasana I with Zoe Knott

4 November, 9.30am-12.30pm, Online

An asana-based practice building towards Virabhadrasana I. The effort and non-attachment from the outcome will give us access to our inner warrior strength, teaching us Patanjali's Abhyasa (the effort to fix one's own self in a given attitude) and Vairagya (detachment).

Ayurveda, Peace of Mind and Harmony with Anna Semlyen

18 November, 10am-4pm. Online

A practical hatha yoga day about the mental constitutions of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

Scotland

events

Explore Forward Bends with Zoe Knott

28 October, 10am-4pm

Church of the Good Shepherd, Edinburgh, EH12 6AU

Forward bends are the cornerstone of our yoga practice. Loved by many, unloved by others. Which category do you fall into? During the workshop we will consider: 1. Why we work in forward bends. 2. Preparations. 3. Stages to allow all abilities to progress safely. 4. How to move in and out of postures in the safest way. We will prepare for asana with specific techniques to stretch or strengthen relevant muscles. The postures will be broken down and considered stage by stage. This will enable us to give each of our students a stage they can work with and a path on which they can progress on their forward bending Journey.

Midlands

growing ever greener

Aspects of A Good Yoga Practice with Gillian Gee

18 November, 10am-4pm

Kegworth Village Hall, Kegworth, Derby, DE74 2FH

This is a practical day on yoga including movements, asana, pranayama, relaxation and meditation;

exploring these different aspects to enhance the individual's practice of yoga. Whilst working on asana, considering awareness of the space we are in, flexibility, sensations, stability, strength and whether to control the breath or not. We'll be looking at connections and relationships between the arms, diaphragm, neck, shoulders and spine. Also working on hip flexibility to find comfort in the seated position, with emphasis on the importance of concentration on the body, mind and breath for unification.

Ayurvedic Diet and Lifestyle with Tarik Dervish

10 February, 10am-4pm

The Landmark, Peasley, Mansfield, NG19 7SP

There will be a basic introduction to Ayurveda and the emphasis will quickly move to the recommendations related to diet and lifestyle. Ayurveda generally recommends balance in all things but what might bring balance to one may cause imbalance for another. Lifestyle and food are a very tricky business and ultimately, it is important to build a very personal relationship with what you eat and do. This workshop aims to raise your awareness of what you do and whether it is working.

An Exploration of Mudra with Swami

Krishnapremananda

20 April, 10am-4pm

Calow Community Centre, Chesterfield, S44 5AT

An opportunity to learn and experience different classical mudras, that can subsequently enhance your own personal practice, including prana mudra, ashwini mudra, akarma mudra and shanmukhi mudra leading to spaciousness. Other practices will include: brahmari pranayama and yoga nidra.

The Bandhas – Core Practices of Yoga with Swami

Krishnapremananda

21 April, 10am-4pm

Papplewick Village Hall, Nottinghamshire, NG15 8FB

The three bandhas can add so much to our yoga practice, stimulating energy and spaciousness, and are excellent preparation for meditation. Participants will feel a renewed inspiration for their yogic practice and lifestyle.

Pranayama: The Healing Dimension with Philip Xerri

23 June, 10am-4pm

Papplewick Village Hall, Nottinghamshire, NG15 8FB

Prana is seen to be the core energy of our being: it is the 'juice' of life. Pranayama is the quintessential practice in yoga whereby this energy is manipulated.

Thus, pranayama can be utilised as a powerful tool in self-healing. In this workshop, we will explore this vast subject from four general directions:

- 1/ Directional Healing. The Pranava AUM.
- 2/ Classical. Various pranayamas from the main texts of yoga will be introduced and their therapeutic applications explored.
- 3/ Rhythmical Breathing. Manipulating prana with the introduction of particular rhythms.
- 4/ Pranayama Kriyas and Mudras

South East

events

Breath Space with Julie Pons

19 November, 10am-3.45pm

Bluebell Hill Village Hall, Chatham, Kent, ME5 9QR

Breath is central to yoga, pilates and other movement practices. This is an opportunity to spend a day exploring why breath is essentially 'shape change' and we will dive into all those shape changes from an anatomical point of view as well as exploring the aspect of breath and shape change from a yoga therapy angle.

Dinner Before Dessert Part II with Zoe Knott

20 January, 10am-3.45pm

Shoreham Village Hall, TN14 7TB

As always with Zoe and Hugh this will be day full of wonderful surprises – guaranteed lots of yoga and one of Hugh's magic tales. So, come prepared to have a day full of joy, a great workout to improve your strength and flexibility!

Teaching Pranayama with Philip Xerri

17 February, 10am-3.45pm

Online

This workshop is on how to introduce, develop, and maintain an ongoing basic breathing/pranayama practice into a class situation in a logical, structured, and sequential way, with safe progression. It will show us a wide range of practices that can be used to introduce basic breathing and pranayama. The main focus will be the first year of practice, but various ways of developing and maintaining an ongoing progressive practice through years two and three will be outlined.

North West

enjoying sell-out events in 2023

Our Autumn Festival was fully booked weeks before the event was set to take place in October, just as Spectrum was going to press.

We also enjoyed a fully booked summer sangha and we hope to have the same enthusiasm for events we're lining up for you for 2024.

Please see the website for updates coming soon for our CPD and yoga festival events.

Janet Long
Regional Officer



hope you can come along for what promises to be a rejuvenating and inspiring day of yoga, complementary therapies and tasty food.

There will be four yoga teachers offering four different sessions and the day will start at 10am with Rosie Wright.

Rosie is an experienced and well loved DCT based in Suffolk and will start the day with a Hatha yoga practice integrating the elements and our true nature.

Donna Negus will continue the day after a short break with pranayama and meditation. Donna is training to be a DCT and her first teacher training course starts May 2024. She has been Regional Editor for five years and teaching yoga in Essex since 2004.

This session will give us space to rest in awareness of how we are in the moment and cultivate connection to the ever-changing world around us. Embedded within this session will be compassion for all that we encounter and all that we feel.

After a tasty lunch that will be provided; Elaine Fletcher will lead a discussion on the philosophical principles within yoga that give us the tools to embrace life in all its wonder as well as sadness. Elaine has a wealth of knowledge and many years of practice and teaching and this promises to allow us to understand how yoga can be something we do not have to confine to our mat.

The day will conclude with a yoga nidra practice led by Judy Hirsh Sampath. Judy is a well known yoga therapist and teacher trainer and this session will give us time to rest within a safe and warm space and nourish our body as well as our spirit.

There will be reiki and Indian head massage available as mini treatments throughout the day as well as stalls with books, jewellery and Neals Yard products. All profits will be donated to Guide Dogs Support and we hope you can help make this day both enjoyable and successful. Bookings are open on the Eastern Region website (bwy.org.uk/eastern/events) and we look forward to seeing you!

Eastern

joining together for Sangha

We hope you had a wonderful summer and you're looking forward to all that the changing seasons can offer.

Your Eastern Region volunteers are excited to come together and offer Sangha (community gathering) Saturday 2 December.

The theme of the day will be Embracing Life and our sessions are based around the gratitude we can feel for the life we lead. This is to be held in Boreham Village Hall, Essex (CM3 3JD) but you will also have the opportunity to join us via Zoom. We

More events for you to book on our website include:

Restorative Yoga with Carol Trevor.

Wilstead Village Hall, Bedfordshire

3 February 2024

In our often agitated world, our nervous system and health are taxed by ever greater vigilance. True rest can be rare (and undervalued), and it is easy for everyone to forget our essential nature of Being that the yoga texts speak of. Rest is not only vital for our physiological health; it is the bedrock of our emotional and mental wellbeing, and of our presence in the world. Restorative yoga provides the essential, beautiful rest so needed by teachers and students alike. It celebrates a return to parasympathetic balance, benefiting not only daily life, but several contemporary health conditions. Through its very nature it offers a portal to yoga's subtle realms too. This effortless return to ease sustains the ground of our steadiness and compassion as teachers. Please join us for this relaxing and nourishing day to discover the practice, principles and gentle power of restorative yoga. A practice for our time and a gift to our communities.

Creative Lesson Planning with Dawn Wesselby.

Hemingford Abbots Village Hall, Cambridgeshire

17 February 2024

This is an interactive day to help the creative juices flow and revitalise your lesson planning with the help of an experienced DCT. It is rare to get this chance to work so closely with a DCT and during the day you will be working in small groups creating and sharing lesson plans based on themes, philosophical quotes, and from asana cards. Dawn will share some ways of finding inspiration and clearing your lesson planning blocks by providing a list of themes and philosophical quotes that you can use to inspire your lesson planning.

Five Element Theory with Ade Belcham.

The Costessey Centre, Norfolk

Ayurvedic five-element theory provides a useful model to help think about balance and right effort in yoga practice. This workshop explores the practical application of the theory in the context of asana. This day will provide an exploration of the Ayurvedic concept of 5 element theory and its application in yoga practice. We will use 5 element theory to explore the physical and mental aspects of yoga asana practice. We'll also consider how this model can help us find balance in our approach to asana through the cultivation of sensory attention.

First Aid:

27 January 2024 Costessey Centre, Norfolk

2 March Hemingford Abbots Village Hall, Cambridgeshire

We wish you all the joy of the coming season and look forward to seeing you on your mat.

Health, happiness and love to all,

Your Easter Region Volunteers.

For enquiries please email us;

Regional Officer: Rosie Evans

E: east.ro@bwyregions.org.uk

Regional Training Officer: Pauline Morgan

E: east.rto@bwyregions.org.uk

Yorkshire

festivals of inspiration for you

Catherine Eastwood our Regional Training Officer attended the World Yoga Festival in Henley Upon Thames, Oxfordshire this summer (August 3 to August 6) and would like to share what a fabulous experience this was.

There was an extensive timetable with offerings of Yoga throughout the weekend across four huge marquees from 7am in the morning to 8pm in the evening and then music into the later evening. Sessions offered quality teaching across a range of Yoga styles (Hatha, Ashtanga, Kundalini, Iyengar, Jivanmukti, Sivananda, Scaravelli, Yin) along with philosophy sessions, meditation, pranayama, dance, song, sound therapy and Kirtan. It really was Yoga heaven!

Dates for the 2024 festival are August 1-4 and tickets can be bought at W: yogafestival.world

The Yorkshire Regional Sangha took place on 15 July in hybrid format with Sheffield Yoga School and OM Yoga Works (Farsley), linked via Zoom. Everyone enjoyed the fabulous local tutors, Anji Ripley, Helena Turner, Frayah Humphries and Clare Walker and we all took the tech issues in our stride.

Your Yorkshire committee is busy working on the programme of CPD and other events for 2024. There is still one excellent CPD event before the end of the

year. Remember, you don't have to be a yoga teacher to attend:

events

Swara Yoga with Rosemary Bennett

11 November

Well House Yoga Space, Cote Hill Road, Felliscliffe, Harrogate HG3 2LN

The day will include a short talk about Swara Yoga, a balanced hatha yoga practice, two meditation practices of Prana Samyama, a guided trataka practice and shanmukhi mudra and a yoga nidra. Watch out for information about events in 2024 in the Regional magazine, On The Pulse and Regional emails.

Please ensure you book at least six weeks before the event; if there is an insufficient number of bookings we may have to cancel the event.

Looking forward to seeing you on the mat soon either in person or via Zoom.

Lucy Croucher / DharmaKirti

**Regional Officer/Newsletter Editor,
Yorkshire Region**

South West

moving through changes... again!



It has been a busy summer for the BWY in the South West, with additions to our committee of enthusiastic volunteers and lots of events being organised for both members and friends yet to become members, who can share yoga with us all the same – don't forget to invite them!

We have a new Devon Area Rep, Mary-Ella Kyte (pictured above), who is sharing the post with her Deputy, Anna Elliot. They have new ideas for CPD in the region and these will be appearing in our programme as it develops over the next few weeks and months.

Our current schedule of events can be viewed in details here: bwy.org.uk/southwest/.

As I write (in August) our planned events are easily accessible to almost everyone, from Somerset in the west, to Dorset in the east, and Gloucestershire in the north of our region.

All are open to non-members, so bring friends and relatives to encourage them to share your joy of yoga and to showcase the benefits of being a BWY member. It's not just about insurance and Spectrum is it? Being a member opens doors to the community of yoga and will widen their horizons and expand their knowledge and practice, at a very reasonable cost. Your personal recommendation can have a big influence on the rest of someone's life!

Here is a flavour of the events coming up:

- 1 October: Discovering Restorative Yoga with Carol Trevor, near Exeter
 - 14 October: Exploring Sound, Chant & Mantra with Sarena Mason, Cheddar, Somerset
 - 21 October: A Fresh Look at Asana with Zoe Knott, Wimborne, East Dorset
 - 22 October: The Stress System and Altered States Through Breath with Hayley Giles, Holt, East Dorset
 - 28 October: Yoga for Mental Health Conditions with Nikki Jackson, Gloucestershire
 - 11 November: Exploring Parsvottanasana with Zoe Knott, Online
 - 18 November: Integrating Mindfulness and Compassion Into Your Yoga Teaching and Therapy with the award-winning Karen Atkinson of Mindfulness UK, Exeter
 - 18 November: Emergency First Aid at Work with Alison Hawthorn, Shepton Mallet, Somerset
- See you there !

Keith Hart,

Regional Officer for BWY in the South West

Wales

*When all thoughts
Are exhausted,
I slip into the woods
And gather
A pile of shepherd's purse.
Like the little stream
Making its way
Through the mossy crevices
I, too, quietly
Turn clear and transparent
- Haiku by Ryokan*

Autumnal unfolding and we begin to feel the murmur of rhythms winding down for this year. Thank you for all of your support so far in 2023.

The Yoga Sangha here in Wales is ever widening, diverse and vibrant. Sangha as shared community helps to foster our learning process, break down boundaries and provide support for our spiritual practice. We are very lucky to have a range of ashrams and beautiful retreat centres here in Wales where the idea of Sangha as part of our yogic path can be explored. As our yoga practice deepens and we centre ourselves as individuals, we have plenty of opportunity through Yoga Sangha to become more inclusive and accepting through shared community experience within broader settings.

To support the growth of our Yoga Sangha, the

BWY committee in Wales is always focused on connectivity and new ways to reach into our local Welsh communities. There is a wide range of beautiful yoga practice being offered throughout Wales and we are keen to celebrate the diversity and range of homegrown expertise. I ask that those who have been teaching for some time in Wales to get in touch if interested in developing a CPD day. There is support through BWY to help you create CPD days for sharing with our wider community which could bring so much benefit and further depth of yoga knowledge for everyone.

As a reminder, information about events and committee contact details is available on the Wales section of the BWY website. Current news can be found on our social media pages, including our Facebook page "BWY in Wales".

Looking forward to seeing you soon, with my best wishes as always,

Jo Bogacz

Welsh Regional Officer on behalf of the Welsh Committee

events

Touching Life – Partner Yoga workshop with

Natasha Harvey

18 November, 10am - 1pm

Llanfoist Village Hall, Church Lane, Abergavenny
NP7 9LP

A New Light on Yoga with Daniel Simpson

27 January 2024, 1-4pm

Llanfoist Village Hall, Church Lane, Abergavenny
NP7 9LP

Practices and Principles of Therapeutic Yoga for

Women: An Introduction Day with Sophia Ansari

3 March 2024, 10am - 4.30pm

Cardiff Yoga Studio, 12 Bedford Street, (Off St Peter's Street), Cardiff, CF24 3BA

Dates for your diary, venue to be announced

CPD Event – Developing Strength in Single Leg Poses with Zoe Knott

16 March 2024

CPD Event – Meditation – an exploration of practice and teaching with Lynne Jones

23 November 2024.

Enjoying events
in your region?
Volunteer support
is very welcome.
Why not check your
region's webpage for
volunteering
opportunities?

100 YEARS OF LIVING YOGA

VELTA SNIKERE WILSON
1920-2022



It is with deep admiration that we pay tribute to Velta Snikere Wilson. We celebrate the enduring impact and indomitable spirit of a true pioneer who was an inspiration for the creation of BWY and whose influence continues to resonate through her teachings and poetry.

Velta's journey is an emblem of devotion, wisdom and unswerving commitment to the path she believed in. Her influence is felt beyond the mat. Her eloquent words and poetry reveal the profound connection between the practice of yoga and the essence of life itself. Preferring the written word, her poetry became the journey of her soul, and even when she was too weak to hold a pen, she continued to uplift and inspire through her dictations which further demonstrates her unwavering commitment to yoga and art.

This article collates her words of wisdom and tributes from members across the BWY which will also be seen on our website in the near future.

BWY Chair, Diana O'Reilly

Memories of Velta by Liz Till, Gill Hague, Pat Baxter, Estelle Rose, Elizabeth Taylor, Allison Singer and Elizabeth de Michelis

We are honoured beyond words to have put together this celebration of the wisdom of one of the founders and originators of the BWY, Velta Snikere Wilson. Velta died in December last year, age almost 102. Her death was reported in Spectrum earlier this year. Now tributes and contributions have been collected.

It was a letter from Velta to Wilfred Clark in 1965 that led to the founding of our organisation. She was one of the key founding members, continuing in an active role for many years – an important pioneer of yoga in the UK, from the 1950s onwards.

We are a group of her long-term students and friends who have come together to compile this memory and celebration of Velta and to share her incomparable teaching and wisdom. As has been said in previous contributions about her in Spectrum, we will never see her like again.

There have been two previous tributes in Spectrum: Summer 2016 pp.16-18, and Winter 2020 pp. 16-19, the latter celebrating her centenary. At the end of the article, we also include links to videos and portraits of Velta.

In this final tribute, we have worked for some months together, gradually gathering and collecting her words of wisdom to share with others in BWY. Velta operated a bit like the gurus of old and passed on wisdom directly to her students, often on a one-to-one basis. Here, we share just a fraction of what we learned from our great and irreplaceable teacher.

Direct quotes from Velta's printed, published, recorded and spoken words are presented in standard font but identified with quotation marks. Remembered quotes from her students are similarly presented within quotation marks but are in italics. Her words were often profound, pithy and almost always beautifully sculpted, impressively brief and precisely to the point. She was not a fan of unnecessary elaboration or self-aggrandisement.

We have divided up her words into the Eight Limbs of Yoga, with sections on the Yamas and Niyamas,



and so on. However, many of these contributions cover the whole of yoga and not one specific aspect. We feel it is important for us, as yoga students, practitioners, and teachers, and an opportunity for all of us, to spend time reflecting deeply on these words from one of our great pioneers.

Memories of Velta

Velta made clear to us all that the wisdom and knowledge she gave us came from yoga, not from herself as an individual. Nevertheless, she knew that we were intending to compile this anthology of her words and gave us her blessing,

'Yoga is nobody's invention, but everybody's possible journey of discovery.'

'Yoga is the alignment and merging of one's self with the Great Universal Spirit.'

Generally-speaking, it can be said that yoga is the science among religions, if by science is meant method of procedure, freedom from dogma, and personal verification. It can also be said that yoga is the art among sciences, if by art is meant the staking of one's personality, if by originality is meant total integrity of expression.'

Velta was born in Riga, Latvia, on Christmas Day 1920. Her name means 'gift' and the gifts she has given us all are legion. From early childhood, she entered meditative states spontaneously. Finding her sitting still and rapt at the age of two, her mother asked: 'Where did you come from, little one?' By the age of seven, several of her poems had been published, 'without my consent,' she said. At primary school, she persuaded her mystified friends

to sit down in a circle and listen for the sounds of the subtle inner world, as she practised nada yoga; she was surprised that they could not hear them. Age nine, she resolved 'to only speak the truth, otherwise life is not worth living'. Age 13, she was told by her first yoga teacher in Riga, 'You must have been a yogi in a previous life,' since she already understood everything. He was resistant to taking someone so young as a student until he understood the depth of her understanding. Thereafter he was privileged to teach her, he said.

From her very early years, she wrote poetry. She honed her words, studying philosophy and languages at Riga University. Her linguistic precision was later valued as an interpreter for the British Army in Vienna during and after WWII. This enabled her to support her parents and four younger siblings in their escape from Soviet-occupied Latvia. After marriage in Vienna, to a British officer, she settled in England but maintained her Latvian contacts and supported Latvians in their quest for freedom, initially from Nazi occupation and then from the Soviet regime. For this and for her poetry, she is deeply celebrated in Latvia. She has been awarded the highest honours in Latvia for her work supporting independence for the Latvian people and for her poetry.

In London, she met Ram Gopal who became her yoga and Indian dance teacher. She danced

with him in his famous troupe of Indian dancers. She said that, from Ram, she learned to listen to the wisdom of the body: never to force or strain. Later she gained qualifications in physiotherapy, psychotherapy, and autogenic training. She worked part-time for the NHS and studied comparative religion in the theology library at King's College London. When filling in official forms, for example for the NHS, she entered 'yoga' as her religion.

She taught yoga in the UK from 1951 when it was largely unknown. As a founder of the BWY, she was involved for many years at the heart of our organisation, developing it and taking a pioneering role. She was one of the small group who compiled and agreed the first BWY syllabus for training yoga teachers and she, along with Ken Thompson and Chris Stevens, was the very first to offer actual teacher training classes in the UK. Between 1971 and 2001, she taught hundreds of yoga students to be BWY teachers. In all her yoga classes, the elegant precision of her language was matched by the effortless clarity of her physical asanas.

Velta practised yoga for nearly 100 years. She ran her own yoga centre, the Natarajayoga Centre in London. She met many of the yoga greats of the period, for example, BKS Iyengar. She developed her wisdom and understanding, drawing on all aspects of her study as a practitioner, teacher, qualified physiotherapist and counsellor. Velta was open to new ideas and theories always, but grounded

No two leaves are exactly alike,
no two individuals, no two yoga paths.
There are as many paths as there are
individuals treading them.

Velta Snikere Wilson

'Yoga is precise, extreme, joyous'

everything she did in traditional ancient yoga practices and deep understandings.

Sharing what we learned from Velta

'Yoga is not an acquiring of flexibility, but a letting go of tensions and rigidity.'

'Yoga is not an accumulation of information, but a discarding of ignorance.'

'No two leaves are exactly alike, no two individuals, no two yoga paths.'

'There are as many paths as there are individuals treading them.'

'Yoga is becoming alive to one's own path, being guided by universal laws.'

'Yoga is the re-alignment of our outer lives with our own innermost principles,

– and of our own inner selves with the vastness of spirit.'

Drawing from Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga, Velta taught us that yamas and niyamas are not restrictive laws, but natural and ethical principles, with outcomes for us to explore in our own practice – signposts for our journey of discovery. She emphasised throughout her teachings that the yamas and niyamas need to underlie everything we do in yoga, before we even begin to think about asana. Her precise, poetic 'sutras' were always memorable. We can share a few with you:

Yamas and Niyamas

'Asanas if not practised... damage to physical posture.

Yamas/niyamas if not practised... damage to 'inner' posture.

The road is as important as the goal.'

'Know your Yamas and Niyamas by heart: they are your psychic protection.'

Yamas

Ahimsa 'Never force or strain. Let go of stiffness.' 'Non-violence is much bigger than the physical. It underlies everything in our lives. It includes non-violence to ourselves.'

Satya 'Always speak the truth. If it seems impossible to avoid lying: well, just say nothing. Keep quiet. You don't need to speak about everything.'

'No dogma; your life and yoga is your own responsibility.'

'Peeling layers from the onion to find the truth within.'

Asteya 'Yoga is nobody's invention: always acknowledge your sources.'

'Don't 'steal' yoga as your own.'

Brahmacharya 'Do not squander yourself.'

'Be faithful and loyal.'

Aparigraha 'Take gently – do not grab; hold-do not clutch.'

'If your possession possess you, you cannot travel in time.'

'Do not grasp at the breath, your asana practice, your life.'

Niyamas

Saucha 'Live as purely as you can.'

Santosa 'There is no competition in yoga; each starts with a different body.'

'Appreciate what you can do.'

Tapas 'Yoga is precise, extreme, joyous.'

'While you let go of stiffness rather than 'grabbing' flexibility, you also have to stretch and practise. Otherwise, nothing will happen.'

'You cannot just "believe" yoga: you have to do it.'

Swadhyaya 'Observe yourself.'

'Be vigilant and sensitive. Find your own path.'

Ishwara pranidhana 'Keep your attic window open in case something comes in.'

Velta very often stated this aphorism:

'Whether you believe anything or not, just keep the attic window open. You never know.' 'You may find that new wisdom, understandings, insights fly in.'

Velta on asana

Here we share a few general overriding 'sutras'.

'Yoga is not "acquiring" flexibility, but "letting go" of rigidity.'

'Arrange your body without forcing or straining.'

'Retain a sense of respect for the dignity of your body.'

'Always take your awareness within...'

'Expand your consciousness beyond yourself.'

'Aligning yourself with Infinity.'

'Any movement can be yoga; it depends on the attitude you do it with.'

'The whole body heals any part which is dis-eased: therefore, work with the whole body.'

Pranayama, including bandhas, mudras and kriyas

Pranayama

Pranayama was a foundation stone in Velta's teachings. She combined a deep spiritual understanding of prana but insisted on a physiologically correct understanding of respiration. For example, she said: 'It is possible to breathe deeply down into the diaphragm, flattening it on the inbreath. It is not possible to breathe into your belly. Do not say this in your teaching. Or if you do say this, qualify it as being symbolic only. In any case you need to protect the pelvic floor and internal organs from excessive downward pressure on breathing in and holding the breath.'

'Practise Kapalabhati every day: it benefits the digestive system, clears the airways, and "polishes the inside of the skull" stimulating the pituitary gland and the brain.'

'Alternate nostril breathing: practice it as often as you can. If you are hot, start with the left side; if you are cold, start with the right side.'

'When you retain the breath, maintain mula (or Moola) bandha to protect your pelvic floor and internal organs from the downward pressure.'

'For a long holding of the breath or kumbhaka, after the inbreath, apply all three bandhas (uddiyana, jalandhara and mula/moola bandhas) and release them before the outbreath.'

'Breathe deeply to fill your lungs and flatten your diaphragm. But don't physically push your belly out. Breathing can be very deep but the breath happens in the lungs not the abdomen.'

'Prana is much more than breath.'

Mudras

A vivid memory: 'When Velta was performing her mudras I saw her transform in front of my eyes to another person. This was witnessed by another person. She became what she was performing. Magic.'

She always explained that a mudra is a message or gesture from yourself to your Self.

Pratyahara and relaxation

Velta encouraged her diploma students to attend

her separate courses on autogenic training. This method, derived from Pratyahara – ancient yoga nidra, but westernised and fully researched and developed by German and other doctors and medical researchers, is described in Spectrum Winter 2021 pp 35-36. She suggested that, even though now mainly a western technique, autogenic training provides a useful practical method for how to do yoga relaxation. It has been a life-saver for very many of us.

In her regular asana classes, the 20 minutes of deep relaxation at the end, with rotation of consciousness and chakra awareness, were deeply healing: even, perhaps, a brief taste of samadhi.

'It breathes me' – autogenic instruction or 'Life breathes Me.'

Dharana, dhyana and samadhi

'Yoga is the transition from laziness to wisdom [intelligent orderliness].'

In her poetry, Velta expressed the deeper levels of consciousness she accessed.

'An old saying: consciousness resides in everybody as butter resides in milk: it needs to be churned; and thinking is the churning.'

'Bliss is your birth-right.'

'If you have never experienced samadhi you cannot understand it... When you have experienced samadhi, you cannot explain it.'

'Samadhi cannot be attained by direct effort; it is a grace, a gift, that may arrive at any time.'

Learning to teach yoga, with Velta

At the beginning of each teacher's diploma course session, there was a memory game. We took turns, around the circle, to restate the Eight Limbs (Patanjali ch 2 sutras 29-42) and especially the yamas and niyamas, signposts to the results of practising yoga.

Then, we shared experiences, events and insights, related to each yama or niyama, since the last group meeting. This reflective practice enabled the development of a deep understanding of them. We also discussed how we used the asanas in our everyday lives.

Velta related daily life to yoga philosophy with common sense, easily understood.

‘Yoga is to be shared, but first:
‘Deepen your practice and know yourself.’
‘Be prepared for change. Yoga will change you.’

‘Do not do yoga because you feel you have to or ought to, but because you want to.’

‘Yoga is independence, taking responsibility for one’s own actions, NOT other people’s.’

‘If a student falls asleep in your class, it is probably because they are tired: let them rest.’

‘If I phone you at 3am in the morning and ask you, ‘what is the third niyama?’ you must be able to answer me. Learn the yamas and niyamas by heart.’

Questions to ask yourself on the yamas and niyamas:
‘Observe yourself non-judgementally, daily, for a week, for each yama/niyama, making notes on the following questions:

Why practise this?
What are the results of not practising?
What are the results for the world if everyone practised?
Is it possible to practise 100%?
What obstacles limit my personal practice?”
To what degree [%] do I practise?”
How could I practise more completely?”
[See Patanjali Ch2, Sutras 35-45 for results of practising 100%.]
Be ready to report back to your fellow diploma students...’

‘Follow your own path: there are as many ways of teaching yoga and experiencing yoga as there are yoga practitioners and teachers.’

On a lighter note, when asked about all the new, strenuous or hybrid forms of yoga that have appeared in recent years, Velta waved her hand and said: ‘As long as they do no harm – and that is most important – just let them play.’

Later years and preparing for the end of life

Velta regularly attended BWY Diploma Course Tutor weekends until she was 80 years old and CPD and First Aid training days into her nineties. She came to the BWY 50th Anniversary Celebration Day in London; and attended many other seminars, for example the Scientific and Medical Network and workshops.

When she was less mobile, she continued to follow and comment on world news; and she enjoyed science programmes on radio and TV – Prof Jim Al Khalili was a favourite presenter.

Velta explored alternative healing methods: a deep cut on her shin which stubbornly refused to heal, she was treated by shining a red laser beam around the edges, as advised by a former student. She was glad of cranial treatments from a student of hers and she discovered a gifted Crouch End-based acupuncturist. She both offered and received healing at a distance.

Velta approached death with equanimity and grace. When she could no longer offer yoga classes in her yoga room at home, students continued to visit her to discuss Patanjali and yoga philosophy. Many of us continued to phone her for advice. Her memory of the previous conversation, and for the details of our lives, was astonishing.

This poem, translated from the Latvian by Agris Krumins, early in 2023, says so much about her capacity for friendship:

On hearing

*‘Let’s put ear to ear
And listen in
To each other
As to a seashell’s sough;
Untill the sea’s deep
Until the room’s breadth
Until the sand’s susurrations
Is heard
In each other.’*

She was deeply curious about people – and about the nature of Consciousness. ‘If you want to understand something, write a poem about it,’ she said. Poor sight made legible writing difficult in her last two years, so she needed scribes. ‘Velta here: a poem has arrived’ she would announce on the phone; we took dictation. The last poem she dictated, on 17 September 2021:

*‘I was not asleep
And I was not awake
I was where things are made known
And I understood
What I knew not was there.’*

Following her 101st birthday, Velta stayed in her

hospital bed at home, still practising gentle yoga movements, and reminded us, by demonstrating the graceful hand mudras.

When asked about the transition at the end of life, she said: 'I have always lived partly in another world'.

She viewed death, she said: '...with curiosity'.

She was asked towards the very end of her life: 'If you could choose just one piece of advice to pass on – just one – and that you would like us to remember – what would it be?'. After a short silence, she replied in her much weakened voice: 'Keep asking'.

For the last four days of her life, she did not speak, eat or drink, but lay there, simply breathing, peacefully.

With our deepest thanks

We all learned immeasurably from Velta and we will go on doing so. We are committed to passing on her wisdom whenever we can and have shared just a fraction of it here. We are joined by many in BWY in giving thanks to Velta for all she has given. And we continue to honour her memory by sharing her poems and wisdom with our yoga students and others in both the yoga world and the wider world.

We end this celebration of Velta with one of her best-known poems on yoga:

*Yoga is not
a collection of information.
But a process of transformation.
Not a matter of skilful manipulation.
But of detaching layers
of 'not knowing' from yourself*

*Yoga is an opening
of silence within the mind,
The dissolution of clouds
In the pool of clarity
And allowing passage
to the winds of space*

*Yoga is the arising of a smile
from the roots of silence
The play of sunlight
on the open petals
And allowing passage
to the breath of grace.'*

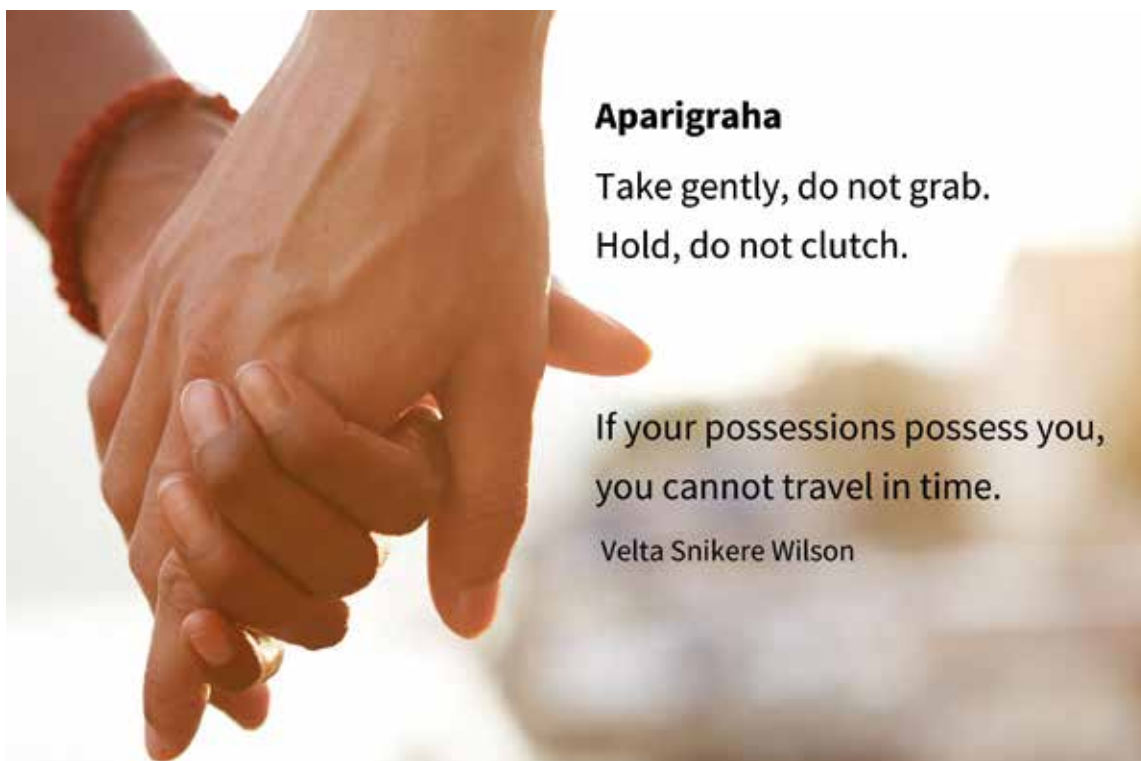
Links

Portrait on p.43 Marianne Simonin

W: shivashaktiyoga.co.uk

Agris Krumins and his daughter Sarma offer this link to their beautiful, short film of Velta, then aged 94 yrs, in Latvian, with English sub-titles.

<https://youtu.be/MHVM1FpApgl>



Aparigraha

Take gently, do not grab.
Hold, do not clutch.

If your possessions possess you,
you cannot travel in time.

Velta Snikere Wilson

A woman with dark hair in a ponytail is shown in profile, performing a yoga pose. The image is overlaid with a teal-to-white gradient that transitions diagonally from the bottom left to the top right.

BWY

Two women are shown in profile, performing a yoga pose. The image is overlaid with a purple-to-white gradient that transitions diagonally from the bottom left to the top right.

AT
THE
HEART
OF YOGA

Train with us. Develop with us.

Turn to pages 10-11 for our full yoga training
and development opportunities.

bwy.org.uk