

MAKING WHOLE WITH YOGA

Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Meeting the Challenge Conference

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BACKGROUND

The **Trauma Informed Care and Practice (TICP): Meeting the Challenge Conference** was held in Sydney Australia, in June 23-24th, 2011. It was organised by the Mental Health Co-ordinating Council (MHCC - www.mhcc.org.au) and collaborating partners, Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ACSA- www.asca.org.au), Education Centre Against Violence and the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network for workers and services in Mental Health and the range of broader human services. The conference provided a major impetus in the evolution of a trauma informed agenda for Australia. Relevant tenets and aims that inspired this paper are:

1. There is need for workers and services to comprehend the complexity of the impact of trauma and respond appropriately
2. The conference aims to expand knowledge, educate, inform, generate discussion and cultural shifts, and drive change towards trauma-informed care and practice
3. The conference will maximise consumer and carer input
4. Trauma Informed Care And Practice has at its core, awareness of the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of trauma survivors and this awareness informs a holistic approach to recovery.

To find out more about the conference and papers, <http://www.mhcc.org.au/TICP/webcasts.aspx>

MAKING WHOLE WITH YOGA – Abstract

The impacts of trauma can be held or hidden anywhere in our bodies, thought processes or emotional make-up. The practices of Yoga (meaning union) have, for centuries, helped release people physically, mentally and emotionally onto their path towards wholeness.

LYNN ROMEO is a Gita yoga teacher, social worker, writer and mother who has been liberated by the mid-life discovery of her own early childhood trauma.

Lynn will take us on a gentle journey using metaphor, yoga techniques, story and discussion, to glimpse blockages that childhood trauma can create and explore how yoga can safely release these. Gita yoga is designed specifically for western bodies and minds and understands the role our sub-conscious plays in guiding and protecting us. Students find their own gradual path through progressive stretches, postures, breathing exercises, relaxation and meditation techniques and along the way dissolve effects of past trauma without necessarily being conscious of it. Once in a while, some, like Lynn, find themselves gently cradled towards their inner black holes and blockages, eyes wide open, and surprised by the power, health and clarity that come from facing the challenges.

This presentation will offer fresh, creative views on essential elements of the whole-making process, giving participants an affirming experience of yogic balancing strategies which they can pass on to others. It will offer signposts to an alternative, holistic culture that will allow workers and services to tune into the impact of trauma and work with the particular strengths and sensitivities of survivors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lynn Romeo straddles mainstream and alternative, professional and creative, material and ethereal realms. She has been a Gita Yoga teacher and Social Work Honours graduate for more than 20 years, a mature-age mother for 17 years and an author of articles on the furnace of family life for 13 years. She shifted from studying medicine to working with people with disabilities and families, then became a Social Worker before teaching residential/support workers. She then found the balance and wholeness that yoga brings so inspiring that she could not help but become a Yoga teacher ... and that was just the beginning.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have worked and studied with courageous people in amazing, distressing and ordinary contexts. In various ways they have all taught me that the key for personal growth and healing (or it's root meaning – whole-making) is for the person to be in control, to let their story unfold, in their way and to be offered support and affirmation tailored to 'where they are at'. There is a compelling drive towards wholeness in people, even in their darkest states. Each and every one of us is doing the best we can, at any given moment, with our inner resources, past influences and outer circumstances.

We are all here, at this particular conference, to share what we know works - for ourselves, for those we work with and care about. For me it is Yoga. In fact if I had to choose the ONE single thing that works, most often and most deeply for most people, it would be YOGA. This conference gives me an opportunity to bring together my various hats – Yoga teacher, Social Worker, Writer, and simply a mother, daughter and grand-daughter who has been dealing with her own mid-life monster which turned out to be some buried early-childhood trauma.

That's how I discovered the incredible parallels between the way yoga works and the recovery processes supported by trauma-sensitive counselling and wisdom. It's exciting to see how many of us can come together at this conference, from such varied professional and personal backgrounds and share the same 'aha!' moments. Those of us who have found our way here are likely to see connections and solutions yet to be accepted by the mainstream around us. We can sense the liberation that is possible when trauma, and its effects, are understood and released. The air of expectancy and bud-bursting potential is almost palpable as, together, we foster alternatives in practice and theory that really do work.

I am here to show you a glimpse of yoga (some gentle techniques you can try here and now if you wish), to explain why yoga has worked for thousands of years, how yoga understands the mind-body-emotion connection and thus puts us in touch with our true essence (or spirit). Some 'behind the scenes' explanations (that you wouldn't get in a yoga class) will help us to blend the yogic wisdom with the ground-breaking and effective work in the trauma support field - with a particular emphasis on understanding how trauma effects our very foundations and how yoga can help repair or replace those wobbly stumps.

2. WHAT IS YOGA?

YOGA OUTLINED

- Yoga is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning Union
- Yoga is a blend of ancient practices/way of life/philosophy that bring together Mind, Body, Emotions and thus help us find our true essence or spirit
- The history of yoga can be traced back through India, to ancient Egypt and beyond.
- There are as many types of yoga around the world as there are types of bread. Some are very physical, some are at the other extreme of the continuum and are purely meditative/devotional and there are many shades in between.
- The yoga I teach is called GITA YOGA, one of the middle-of-the-road yoga traditions that is specifically designed for western bodies and minds. It includes Hatha (physical stretches & postures), breathing exercises, relaxation techniques and meditation. Gita yoga also has a particular understanding of our sub-conscious and how it relates to the person we are in everyday life.
- My focus is on Gita because it is what I know and because, as a middle-of-the-road style, it will give you an overview NOT because it is the best or only form of Yoga (I will give you ways to investigate the range of yoga traditions, later).
- Thousands of years of practice tell us that Yoga works in many ways.
- There is a large and growing body of scientific evidence of the myriad physical and mental health benefits – still just the tip of the ice-berg compared to the body of yogic wisdom, but a start.
- An article in **Medicine Today, July 2010, *Yoga and Meditation – What is the Active Ingredient?*** by Stephen Penman, reported the increasing acceptance of yoga by the medical mainstream in Australia (one study found that 62% of GP's had referred people to yoga in the previous 12 months). It reviewed scientific research verifying the effectiveness of yoga as a treatment for back pain, arthritis, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, autoimmune diseases, epilepsy, pre-menstrual and menopausal symptoms, cardiovascular disease.
- At least one trauma recovery centre in the USA, the Trauma Centre in Boston, headed by Dr. Dessel van der Kolk, Professor of Psychiatry, clinician and researcher in PTSD, integrates yoga into their programs and personal and professional practice. Dr. Van der Kolk took up yoga himself when he was “... *looking for a way for people to regulate the core arousal system in the brain and feel safe inside their bodies.*” He discovered that

yoga is a way “ ... to get people to safely feel their physical sensations and to develop a quiet practice of stillness.” He adds that:

“It’s striking that there’s nothing in western culture that teaches us that we can learn to master our own physiology – solutions always come from outside, starting with relationships, and if those fail, alcohol or drugs. Yoga teaches us that there are things we can do to change our brainstem arousal system, our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and to quiet the brain.”

[‘Yoga and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An interview with Bessel van der Kolk, MD’, in *Integral Yoga Magazine*, 2009]

- There was a National Survey of Yoga in Australia, by researchers at RMIT in 2006, involving nearly 4000 respondents. [S. Penman, 2006, *Sign of the Times*].
 - 2.9% of Australians do yoga as a form of physical activity (more than, dancing - 2.4% and fishing - 2.1%) ... but if we also include therapeutic use ... it’s more likely that towards 12% of Australians do some form of yoga.
 - Most people take up yoga for health, fitness, flexibility and/or muscle tone (71%) or for reducing stress or anxiety (58%). Some turn to yoga as a form of personal development (29%) or as a spiritual practice (19%).
 - What keeps people coming back to yoga classes is a little different: 43% continue yoga for its for spiritual benefits, 59% for personal development, 80% keep up yoga for health, fitness or flexibility/muscle tone, 79% for reducing stress and anxiety.

The specific areas addressed and benefits recognised by respondents to the survey were:

- ❖ Mental health (stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia) 24%,
- ❖ Musculoskeletal 21%,
- ❖ Women’s health 9%
- ❖ Gastro-intestinal 7%,
- ❖ Respiratory 6%
- ❖ Weight management 5%
- ❖ Cardiovascular 4%

Overall, 95% reported improvements in their conditions – 53 % were much better, 29% better, 12% a little better.

The most emphatic reported impact of yoga was the positive effect on outlook, improved perceptions of the quality of life and relationships.

- There are many schools or traditions of yoga here in Australia, some uniquely Australian, some international – you might have heard of Iyengar, Satyananda, Ashtanga, Integral Yoga, just some examples
- The Yoga school I trained with, Gita International Yoga began in 1954, in Melbourne, and since then has operated continuously as a full-time yoga school. In that 57 years those involved with Gita have seen the effects in thousands of people who have come through their doors. Gita has also trained around 400 teachers who are teaching quietly and steadily around the country and world. The Gita yoga framework developed specifically for our western bodies and active, questioning, minds was also created for these turbulent times. Even though the term trauma might not have been in people's minds until recently there has been a clear understanding that yoga in general, and this particular yoga framework, would be needed to deal with the predicted escalation and revelation of challenges and trauma at this time in our shared history.

UNDERLYING KEYS TO YOGA – our different ‘bodies’

THE MIND-BODY-EMOTION CONNECTION

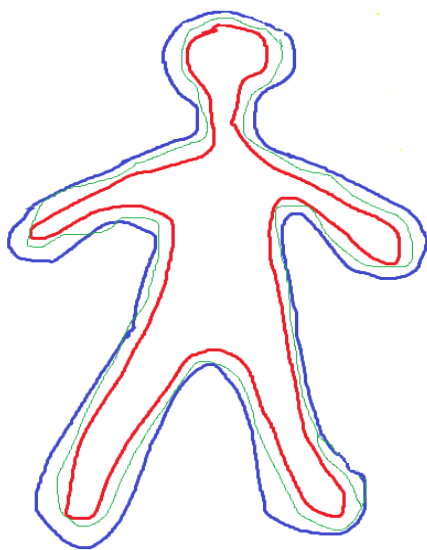
You might like to pause for a moment and notice where your body is in space ... observe, without judgement (because there is no right or wrong, no good or bad) your position, your posture, the placement of your arms and legs. Now consider your mind, use your hand to indicate to yourself where in your body your mind is located. And now your feelings, your emotions ... where are they, where in your body do you feel them?

It is quite common, in answer to these questions, for us to indicate that our mind is in our brain and our emotions are in or near the solar plexus, around our navel, or near our heart.

Yoga rests on the understanding that our mind, body and emotions are intricately linked. We have, not just a physical body, but also a mental ‘body’ and an emotional (sometimes called astral) ‘body’:

Our different ‘bodies’:

Physical Mental Emotional



A physical body – Our overall body and all of its systems (eg. central and autonomic nervous systems, circulatory, digestive, respiratory) down to the tiny components of each cell.

A mental ‘body’ – Our brain, thoughts, conscious mind, sub-conscious and un-conscious mind, including the consciousness that exists in each and every one of our cells.

An emotional/astral ‘body’ – there are centres at our heart and solar plexus that relate to our emotions but our feelings can also be ‘felt’ in every cell, every body part.

There are correspondences between our mind, body and emotions. Something that is experienced in our physical body will also register emotionally and mentally. A blockage in one of our 'bodies' creates a blockage in the others, not necessarily in the same physical space. [Similar to the 'Somatic Markers' referred to by authors/clinicians like Rothschild and Damasio, *8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery*, 2010].

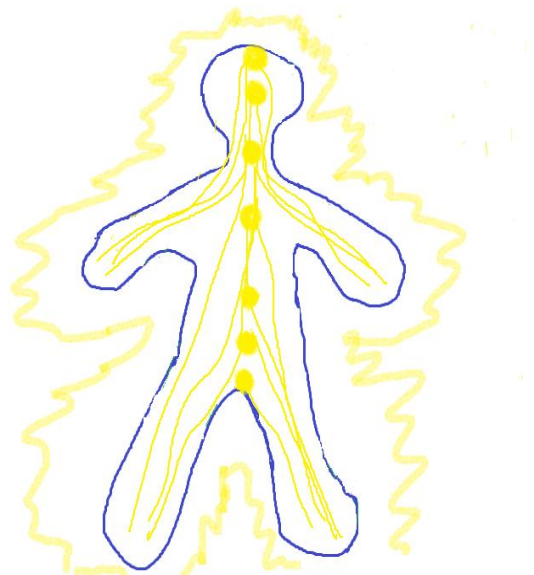
This is why we say trauma, or for that matter, any experience, can be held, felt or hidden anywhere in our body (or 'bodies'). It will also register very strongly in our 'energy field'.

OUR ENERGY/ETHERIC BODY – Like the electrical wiring in our house

Understanding things in terms of energy is one of the keys to linking yogic wisdom and our western analytic mind, I think. A common thread underlying many eastern traditions and, in fact, 'New Age' and 'Ancient' healing practices is the understanding that there is a pervading life-force or energy that gives vitality to all life-forms. In yoga we call this **Prana** (also called Ki, Chi, Qi, Ruach, etheric energy in the East and Mid East). It is our personal and shared energy or vitality - like the electricity flowing through the wiring in our house.

This life-force flows through, directs and transforms our physical, mental and emotional bodies via a fourth 'body' that we can call the our **Etheric or energy body**. This consists of **Nadi's** (meridians) which are lines of energy and **Chakras** (energy centres) and they act like the electrical wiring and transformers we find in our hour house.

ETHERIC/ENERGY BODY



We don't see either the electricity or the wiring in our house but it is because they exist that we see the glow of lights, feel the heat from an electric heater and use an array of appliances. In the same way, we can't see our prana or life-force (unless we have that rare gift of being

able to see auras) but we can experience the effects in terms of flowing or blocked energy and vitality.

Etheric blockages or gaps lead to dis-ease, dysfunction and imbalance that can be experienced physically, mentally and emotionally. On the path to recovery from the withheld effects of trauma people often describe a sense of inner blackness (eg. 'Black Dog', 'black-holes', darkness, black curtain), or void (sucking vortex, abyss, chasm, gulf, hollowness, emptiness, hole), blockages (heavy boulder, walls, drapes, schisms, rupture, break) or feeling swamped or overwhelmed. There is no doubt in my mind that these all describe very clearly what happens to our energy field in trauma:

- specific or generalised blocks to the flow of life-force,
- areas where the life-force is dammed, creating pressure and overwhelm
- areas where there is an absence of life-force – holes, gaps and blackness

Life-force/Prana comes to us in breath, fresh pure water, food that has been recently alive and minimally processed. A focused mind amplifies prana and its flow. Breathing consciously, with our mind in our body, is one of the most effective ways of increasing our vitality and keeping our life-force flowing and thus working through blockages.

YOGA EXPERIENCED

BREATHING (PRANAYAMA)

Breathing Exercise – watching the flow

You might like to pause a moment, drop your shoulders back and down, and then simply watch your breath. No need to try to change it ... just watch the flow of air in through your nostrils, into your lungs and then out through your nostrils.

Observe the flow ...

In ... and ... out ... and ... in ... and ...out;

In ... and ... out ...and ... in ... and ... out.

Repeat, watching the air as it moves through your nostrils.

Now release your focus from your breath and notice what you are experiencing ... in your body ... in your mind ... and how are you feeling?

The simple act of observation is all that is needed to help our breath naturally deepen and settle.

When our breath settles so does our emotional body. It is as if, somewhere within us there is a surface like a pond or an inland lake. The surface can be rough, choppy or rippled but as we settle the surface becomes smooth, clear and mirror-like. When we become practiced at quietly watching our breath this smooth reflective surface can show the depths we are ready to see, with clarity and minimal distortion, and more and more it can reflect the peaks and troughs of our life and self, again, without distortion.

When we are emotionally balanced our feelings motivate us, without controlling or consuming us and we are less likely to bury or deny our emotions. The breathing we do in Yoga is central to emotional balancing, but the physical and mental work we do is also integral.

STRETCHES AND POSTURES (HATHA)

When we stretch in yoga we move just the amount that feels right for us, stopping at the point before we feel pain and breathing there, allowing our body to give in. We breathe whilst in the stretch or position (staying there only as long as feels right for us) and we release into movement rather than pushing or forcing.

Clench and release stretches

For a taste of the physical release that is possible through yoga, you might like to squeeze your hands into fists and clench your toes. Squeeze them as tight as is comfortable, then open wide, stretch out your fingers and toes, as much as your shoes will allow ... everything stretched ... and now let go ... release ...

Notice the sensations in your fingers, your hands and in your toes and your feet. There's no right or wrong, simply observe what you are feeling in your hands and feet.

Stretches might seem like hard-work to us but our muscles experience a stretch as relaxation. Before we became trapped and self-conscious in our bodies, we probably had instinctive urges to stretch, as do our cats and dogs. Most yoga classes start with gentle, warming and limbering stretches and then move into postures (ASANAS – positions to be held because of their physical, mental, emotional, etheric benefits).

An example of a posture

If you are able to sit forward on your chair, with your feet flat on the floor or foot rest you might feel comfortable to drop your shoulders back and down. If you can, clasp your hands behind your back and gently pull them down. Notice the squeeze between your shoulder blades and the openness over your heart. As you gently lift the top of your head towards the ceiling, you might like to stretch your chin forward a little and up, just a millimetre or two, so you feel a stretch from the tip of your chin down towards your heart and a stretch across from shoulder to shoulder. Allow your breath to flow and observe what is happening in your body.

Release the posture after 1-5 breaths. Rest your hands in your lap and allow your chin to drop gently towards your chest. Watch what is happening in your body and your breath, now.

[This is a variation of a posture called the Cobra. It's a good example of the many levels that the postures work at. Physically we are opening the chest and rib cage, giving the lungs more space to expand. We are massaging the heart muscle and also creating a gentle lock over the thymus gland, balancing its secretion of hormones into our blood stream. Hormones that control our immune system, helping it to detect what belongs in the body and what doesn't; what is normal cell growth and what isn't. Emotionally we are opening ourselves to the world around us, over-coming fear with love and mentally, this posture helps us to discriminate what is right for us and what isn't. From an etheric or energy point of view this posture balances the energy centre (Chakra) that helps the energy of unconditional love flow to ourselves/others and connect us to a greater whole.]

The physical stretches and postures and even the breathing exercises might not seem very different to warm-ups and exercises you have done for sport/dance/gym work/creative performance ... but the underlying wisdom makes them different, as does the focus on our mind.

MEDITATION

True Yoga brings the mind, body, feelings to settle together, in alignment, in the present moment. In yoga we talk about bringing our mind here and now, one-pointed focus, taking our mind into our body, being the independent observer, the witness – all variations of **'Mindfulness'** as brought from Buddhist traditions into aspects of modern psychology/mental health approaches. In our busy, well-stimulated, externally rather than internally-focused lives, it can take quite some practice to train our mind.

Notice where your mind is now, without judgement. Simply notice ... is it flitting around or distracted by something in particular, is it dull or clear, tired or excited?

Now you might like to try a short exercise – bring your mind to your breath. Observe the flow of air through your nostrils, in ... and... out ... and ... in ... and ... out ... See if you can notice the next few breaths. Is the in-breath, cool or warm? Is the air leaving your nostrils cool or warm?

Release the focus and breathe as you need. Being very honest with you self, how many breaths do you estimate your mind stayed with your breath? Sometimes we are lucky for the mind to stay focussed for one whole breath, other times it's a little easier.

It takes practice, persistence and patience to train our mind, in the same way it takes patience, persistence and practice to train a puppy. Every moment we become aware of our mind and where it is, every moment we chose to train and focus our thoughts to be where we want them

to be – we bring our mind a little more under our control, we sharpen, uplift and clarify it. This mental training and use of breath are examples of meditative techniques.

So now you have experienced some yoga

– hatha, breathing, meditation techniques

Handout – WHAT IS YOGA

WHAT IS YOGA?

- YOGA is UNION – of mind, body, emotion → spirit/essence
- Yoga is a blend of practices, way of living and philosophies that can be traced back through India, ancient Egypt and beyond.
- There are many different types of yoga, from the meditative/devotional to the very physical and all of the shades in between.
- YOGA supports the flow of PRANA (also referred to as life force, vital energy, Chi, Ki or Qi) which gives vitality, health and wellbeing at every level.
- In an Australia-wide study in 2006 it was found that more people do yoga than dancing or fishing. Yoga was seen as most helpful for mental health (stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia), muscle/joint issues, women's health, gastro-intestinal, respiratory, cardio-vascular health and weight management. People reported, emphatically, that yoga gave them a more positive outlook, quality of life and enhanced relationships
- YOGA traditions offer varying blends of:
 - PHYSICAL stretches and postures – *HATHA*
 - BREATHING exercises – *PRANAYAMA*
 - MEDITATION – Controlling the mind, to go beyond the mind
 - RELAXATION – *YOGA NIDRA*
 - PHILOSOPHY/SPIRITUAL PRACTICES
- General/beginners yoga classes usually include an introduction to Hatha, breathing, relaxation and possibly meditation techniques. You can often choose which aspects you would like to pursue more deeply in additional courses.
- Who can do yoga? **EVERYbody**. It is just a matter of finding the right yoga for you.

3. DEEP WHOLE-MAKING is possible when we also include the other key aspect of yoga – relaxation (Yoga Nidra) and when yoga is offered and considered as a whole of life, multi-faceted process or journey not just a set of exercises.

RELAXATION - A DEEPER STORY UNFOLDING

Relaxation is a lot more than a process of releasing physical stress and tension in muscles. Using physical balancing along with gentle, conscious focusing of mind and breath, the process can begin to include mental and emotional release, whether we are aware of it or not:

- Release of old, no longer useful attitudes and thought patterns,
- Relaxing the boundaries/compartments that divide our self or keep us stuck or rigid,
- Gradually dissolving the walls, voids and haze between us
- Releasing or integrating the shadows,
- Facing and taming the demons/monsters within us.

Each physical (hatha) class in Gita-style Yoga, like many traditions, has about 10 minutes dedicated to relaxation. At Gita there are also longer 45 minute classes, deliberately called Progressive Yoga Relaxation, offered separately but recommended as an adjunct to the hatha classes. Many people know little of the process of release that happens in these sessions, experiencing only a sense of deep relaxation, sleep, renewed vitality and nurturing.

It's worth taking the time here to tell you a bit about how Gita as a yoga centre works – the social worker in me wants to say there's a model here that could support and affirm our range of human services. The aim is to run courses that suit people in any stage of their life-cycle and quite simply to provide the conditions for real growth and then let people find their own path through the range of opportunities on offer, with counselling and guidance if they ask for it. Classes run on 4-5 nights a week and some day times. Different types of classes are offered sequentially so people can chose their own program – whatever mix of Hatha (the stretches and postures), Relaxation, Philosophy, Meditation or Breathing courses or classes they feel attracted to. People find their own way, safely, at their own pace. There are many anecdotal stories about the magic of timing and sequence that turn out to be exactly what each individual needed.

Teachers-in-training are required to immerse themselves in all that is offered, in addition to extensive tuition. We teachers graduate with the ability to teach hatha and a certain level of the other aspects. Then Post-graduate courses are offered in order to teach the deeper relaxation, meditation, breathing, philosophy courses.

I completed the 14 month teacher training course 20 years ago, after 12 years as a residential worker and social worker. I have been teaching ever since ... except for a few months after the birth of each of my children. Being a conscientious teacher and professional I, of course, put my hand up whenever possible to do the post-graduate courses. But for 17 years one of the foundational courses, Teaching Progressive Yoga

Relaxation, offered on about 8 different occasions, slipped under my radar – there was always a particular reason not to do it or I simply didn't see this one on the list.

What was going on here? Why did I avoid this aspect of yoga when the rest of it had so inspired me? I see, only now, with hindsight, that quite simply I wasn't ready – there was too much at stake for me and for those around me. Too much invested in keeping up a certain pretence.

I was only ready when years of yoga had placed me, finally, in my body with a mind and heart open to each other. When regular rhythms of walking, writing, morning yoga on the decking were cradling me. When these rhythms had given me enough of a new foundation so that I could safely face my inner 'black hole'. When I had to be ready to face the blockages so the same things wouldn't happen to my children.

That's when I became aware of surfacing feelings, memories and reactions that I had been carrying, buried since early childhood. They had been bundled together, like a hidden boulder weighing me down and creating seemingly unrelated physical and emotional blocks. I finally saw how necessary and possible it was for me to work with the deeper relaxation. I enrolled in the post-graduate Progressive Yoga Relaxation course for teachers, which starts with a cartoon of the delightful Yogic maxim-

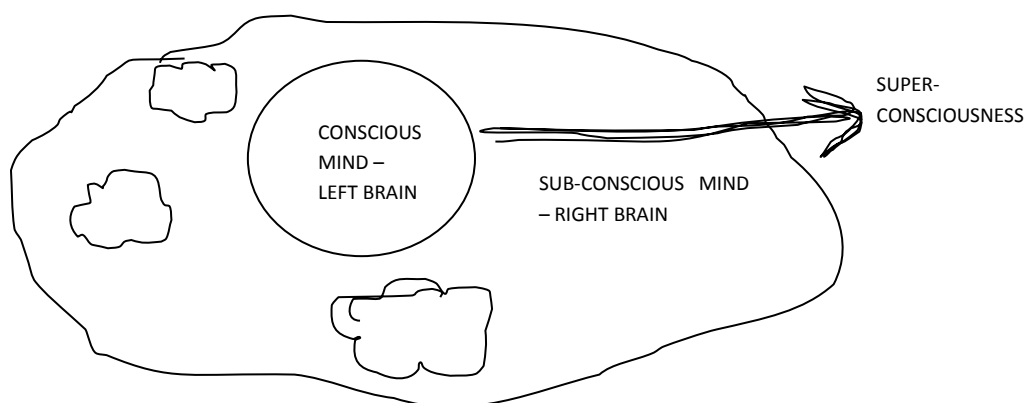
Before attempting to take the splinter out of the eye of your fellow traveller, first take the log out of your own.

It was time, then, for the clarifying and liberating journey of release and it is time now to explain where the sense of liberation comes from.

LINKING SUB-CONSCIOUS, CONSCIOUS AND SUPER-CONSCIOUSNESS

Progressive Yoga Relaxation rests on a great deal of wisdom and practice (see *'Wings of Power'*, by Margrit Segesman, 1973) and involves gentle guidance, suggestions and visualisations that take us from our left brain, our **conscious mind** – rational, ordered, detailed, busy, concrete thinking into our **sub-conscious**, right brain - creative, flowing, feeling, symbolic, overview thinking.

The effects of trauma held in our sub-conscious can be seen as clouds in our sub-conscious, casting shadows, blocking the light.



These clouds can manifest as things we avoid, things we are 'stuck' over, addictions, obsessions, excessiveness, internal gremlins that pull us back every time we are about to make break-throughs, habits we would like to break but can't, long-term tendencies in physical issues. [I, for example, had long-term bowel/digestive system problems. There's no surprise that this is where I can pinpoint a physical location for my symbolic 'boulder' or etheric/energy blockage.]

Progressive Yoga Relaxation (PYR) helps us release the 'clouds', in whatever order, timing and pace is right for us. We might spend months or years just going to sleep in PYR, not conscious of what we are releasing and then one day we might experience a leg-twitch in a session, coming out with perhaps a slight and relatively non-charged memory of a childhood incident or feeling. Nothing lasting about it, just a fleeting memory and then, without necessarily seeing the connection, we might find an improvement in the stiff hip that had been holding us back or discover the next time we see a spider that we are no longer so scared.

When we release some of these 'clouds' we can see more clearly what our path needs to be, we have a stronger direction towards our true essence or spirit – our **super-consciousness**, all-knowingness, intuition, sense of connection with the greater whole. We can have a clearer view of which challenges we need to take on and which are futile or not safe for us at the moment. We can become wise to the deeper reasons we are as we are and why our life is as it is.

4. TRAUMA, OUR FOUNDATIONS AND YOGA AS RE-STUMPING

Let's give our sub-conscious one more treat and use just one more metaphor to help explain the myriad ways yoga helps us to release the effects of trauma.

We can see ourselves as a house, the foundations of which are laid in childhood, to be built on in adolescence and then remodelled at varying stages throughout adult life. Any trauma we experience can shake us to our very foundations and, especially with childhood trauma, may well compromise the ground the stumps are laid in and the integrity of the stumps themselves. We commonly build on the wobbly stumps, covering up any problems.

It's not until we are ready and there are internal or external triggers, or both, that the wobbliness and hints of the cause of recurring cracks show through. We have a choice – continue to patch up, wall-paper over the cracks that appear in different parts of ourselves and lives or make things seem worse for a while as we get underneath, dig around in the mix of muck and fertile dirt to find the wobbly stumps and fix or renew them.

In the renewal process we become like owner-builders or renovators (empowered self-healers) in control of our re-building process, hopefully, with constant access to our own centre (a part of our house that is still stable and comfortable). Any counsellors, support workers or services we come in contact with can be like consultant engineers who do not know the intimate specifics of our precious house and history but are wise observers of the general processes people tend to go through when re-stumping.

HOW YOGA HELPS THE RE-STUMPING AND RE-BUILDING PROCESS

Yoga is one of the regular, firm but gentle patterns that pound in the new stumps to replace or bypass the wobbly ones. I could write a PhD on how and why, but today can I leave you with this list to ponder?

To quote one of our much-loved Yoga teachers, who recently died, very happily, in her 90s:

'Yoga once a week is wonderful, Yoga once a day is miraculous!'

A regular weekly or daily yoga class or practice allows:

- The **rhythmic pounding**-in of new stumps and **pulsating supportive vibrations** to balance any negativity experienced and released as part of the healing process.
- **Control of the path, pace and sequence to rest with the individual.** Although many start with physical aspects of yoga, some people seem to need to begin with breathing or meditation or relaxation – it is inspiring to watch people pick their own path.
- **An anchor into the bedrock**, whilst we gradually find stability in our new foundations – I've watched people from backgrounds of horrific abuse, swing from one state to another. Those who stay connected to their yoga at least in some way, don't seem as likely to swing completely out of orbit or into cocktails of medication, drugs and alcohol.

- The experience of a natural high – many people experience this reasonably early in their introduction to yoga. It's empowering to know **we can create positive, uplifting feelings within ourselves**, with only a teacher's voice guiding us.
- **Multiple levels of release** - release in one → release in all, means some early rewards for our work in establishing yoga.
- Integration - Just as trauma can cause our self to shatter and fragment, yoga, by its very nature, brings the many aspects of our self towards each other. Working with the breath is a key here. **Integration begins to occur in small, natural ways in every class and before long people experience 'new' parts of themselves.** My new-found creativity is an example. There is a businesswoman I know, single (doesn't 'do' family), focused on work, a set amount of yoga each week and a narrow social life. After many years of this prescription, she began talking about brutality she experienced in her teens, and is now on a truth-seeking mission, more flexible than rigid, supporting people within her extended family to release their own trauma.

A regular yoga class provides:

- **Both anonymity and belonging** – students are guided to be in their own space in the group. Thus precious, protective defences can be maintained whilst feeling a part of this often silent yet breathing and supportive group.
- **Acceptable and safe ways for adults to be given space and nurturing** that, in turn, teach or re-inforce self-soothing – the gentle calming voice, the love and compassion shown by the teacher, the positive affirmations offered (eg. "You have all the resources you need within you", "Allow yourself to let go", "Right now there are no demands no expectations just an opportunity to be"). Where else can you go, as an adult, to lie down and rest in a safe place with someone lovingly watching over you and, if you want, gently tucking your feet under a blanket?
- **A safe space to sit with the difficult stuff, to practice silence and stillness**, in gradual, small chunks. Teachers quietly notice when specific breath instructions are needed to help people settle and affirmations will help students feel OK about the range of their responses and reactions.
- **The very real experience of difficult sensations (in thoughts, body or feelings) and the fact that they pass.**
- A whole '**wardrobe' of techniques** that you can try on in your everyday life.
- A **positive role for detachment** and many different techniques and practical instruction for **practicing mindfulness and groundedness.**
- A harmonising, **active partnership with counselling**
- An anchor to support the person through the challenges but also the **subsequent changes in their relationships**
- **The sewing of seeds** – no one is ready for everything that is offered in a yoga class and some people only come once or twice and then don't make it back. It is phenomenal to watch how seeds sown in even the smallest exposure to yoga and barely noticed, can sit within us for years, until the time is right.

Regular yoga assists:

- The creation of **new habits**, with the gently repetitive and rhythmic nature of much of what we do in yoga.
- **The flow of breath and energy/life-force**, even if bodies, minds and feelings are rigid, stuck or blocked. **It is a fallacy that you need to be flexible in order to do yoga.**
- **Physical, hormonal, emotional, mental balancing** that re-inforce each other.
- **Non-verbal pathways** to facing, healing, releasing and transforming the effects and blockages caused by trauma.
- **Integration and involvement of both left and right hemispheres.** Many yoga postures, relaxation techniques and breathing exercises specifically aim to balance our left brain, ordered, detailed thinking with our right brain, rhythmic, creative, over-view thinking. We also often use symmetrical movements, rhythmic breathing and logical instruction combined with guided visualisation to employ and balance both hemispheres.
- **Increased consciousness of all five senses and beyond.** Many people comment on the greater clarity and sensitivity in their senses after doing yoga for a while. This comes from direct focus on our vision, hearing, taste, touch and smell and as a side-effect of many of the yoga practices. There are physical, physiological, emotional, psychological, neurological and biochemical reasons for this sharpening of the senses and they reflect the **changes yoga can bring to both the cortex and old-brain**, as well as the rest of the Central and Autonomic Nervous systems.
- **Re-programming at many levels, including the flight, fight and freeze response.**
- **Subtle ways to clarify the emotions.** In time, within a class and over weeks, months or years of practice, we can have periods of true emotional settling. We can think of it as the rough or rippled surface of an inland lake smoothing out until it is perfectly clear and still, like a mirror. It reflects the peaks and troughs of the surrounding world, without distortion (thus we still have emotional challenges, but more often they are the right ones for us, at the right time and they don't completely ruffle us). On the other hand, one can see into the depths to great beauty and craggy bits, but once again with minimal distortion.
- And so I could go on ...

5. Yoga for Human Services/Support workers

Whether you are involved as a worker or consumer in support services, health, counselling, legal, education or any other, I hope you feel supported and affirmed by this presentation.

Most importantly I trust that yoga now feels more relevant and accessible to you.

Yoga can offer **you**:

- Direct experience of mindfulness and more,
- Balance in your life
- Affirmation of all that is inspiring in what you do and know
- Re-inforced wisdom of the trauma recovery process
- Balance in your week
- The opportunity to look after yourself and foster your own growth whilst supporting others
- Re-juvenation and nurturing
- A way to model the whole-making process and sow the seeds that will allow others to find their own path
- Conditions to support people in the wholeness of life, whilst avoiding co-dependence
- Balance in your day
- Individual focus in supportive groups/communities
- Pragmatic techniques that really help people in crises or in their most 'stuck' states
- Continual re-connection with your real purpose and goals
- Release and ... did I say? ... balance

YOGA FOR YOU and YOUR SERVICE?

I've thought long and hard about the best way to help services like yours integrate yoga. There is no single simple formula but some combination of the following might work for you – Workers doing yoga for themselves, developing relationships with local yoga teachers, referring to local yoga classes, setting up a yoga class in your service, integrating yoga in your programs, supporting a pathway to local yoga classes.

1. **WORKERS DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES.** Become the change you wish for those you care about. First take the log out of your own eye. You probably went some way towards doing this early in your training and work in the field and maybe professional development or supervision keep it on the agenda – but do you have something in every day or, at the least, every week that balances, and gives to you, physically, mentally and emotionally? If not, contemplate getting yourself to a yoga class and see what falls into place for you.

2. DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOGA TEACHERS NEAR YOU, FOR MUTUAL TRAINING, SUPPORT, CROSS FERTILISATION. Your own search for a yoga teacher might reveal a few near your service. Some of the contacts/sites listed below could give you some leads or try local community notice boards, shop windows. There are some larger schools, centres or ashrams and individual studios, but many teachers have classes in local halls and community centres and the like and most yoga teachers teach part-time. Many rely more on word-of-mouth than advertising to keep people coming in to their classes. Yoga teachers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and teach very different styles of yoga. Not all will understand your field of work but many will appreciate the issues, even if the terminology is different.

I hope this paper will go some way to helping you bridge any gaps and start some conversations about yoga and how it might fit in with your perspective, your service and clients' needs. I am planning to write an article for our national professional association, Yoga Australia, and journal, Yoga Today, explaining the 'Trauma informed Care and Practice revolution' to yoga teachers. Hopefully this will soften the way for you.

You might find a yoga teacher who is happy to give some time to one of your professional development sessions and demonstrate their form of yoga. Some allow people to do an introductory class at the beginning of a term, program or course. Imagine the fun you could have de-briefing together, if everyone in your team took themselves off to try out a different yoga class, perhaps using a small portion of your Professional Development funds to cover the costs!

In addition to yoga classes, there is a growing availability of Yoga therapists who offer individual healing and consultations. Their specialisations and focus are likely to be very useful to your service and clients and can be a gently tailored stepping stone into the supportive and empowering group energy that classes offer.

NOTE – YOGA TEACHERS AS PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS - Yoga teachers need to carry insurance, cover the cost of venue hire or maintaining a studio and often have a sporadic work load, dotted over the whole waking hours of the week. We also pay for our own yoga (for many of us, teaching is a privilege that can only be undertaken if we continue to learn and work on our own growth) as well as numerous professional memberships and the range of usual business expenses. So whilst many of us offer yoga as a service to humanity, we also need to have our eye on finances and a balanced exchange of energy that money represents. Some of the larger schools of yoga have philanthropic funds or outreach programs that not-for-profit services might be able to be involved in.

3. REFERRALS. I am sure you already know that referrals work best when made from the heart and a personal connection. If you have tried at least some parts of yoga, or similar practices, and have made some of them your own, then who you are and how you do and

say things will influence people ... more than what you say and tell people to do. Feel free to use any of the explanations and one-liners that have rung true for you in this paper and copy sections of it if you think it will make a difference to someone. Leave brochures on local yoga classes and web sites around your service. Remember the continuum of yoga's, from the purely meditation/breathing/relaxation to middle of the road/mixture of all aspects to the more extremely physical. There is something for EVERYbody. Whilst I, personally would recommend a middle of the road approach at first, it is clear that some people need to head to one of the extremes first.

Yoga is delivered and recommended with unconditional love. We can have as much respect for those who take it up as for those who don't – as we know, there are very real reasons for people needing to find their own path and timing.

There are a list of initial contacts, sites and references at the end of this paper. If you need further assistance tapping into yoga, please email me – romeolynn@yahoo.com.au.

4. SET UP A YOGA CLASS IN YOUR SERVICE/WORK-PLACE. There are a range of human services, community groups, organisations, government departments, corporations who regularly bring yoga teachers in to their work place. Some contact an established yoga school and request a teacher to teach a group on site. Others draw on individual teachers known to staff or on the staff. These yoga classes might be short-term programs aimed at starting workers/service-users off, so they can follow it up in their own time. Others are on-going classes that might have a changing population or the same group of people who attend for years on end. There's the occasional work-place that is able to pay for these classes but in many cases the employer/service provides the venue and access whilst the participants pay for the teacher. There are three models that I have seen work very well in human services.
 - **A regular class or course for staff** – a yoga teacher comes in at a regular time once a week, perhaps a lunch time, to run a re-juvenating class for the workers who are available and interested, in a meeting room or similar, with any tables and chairs pushed to the side. I have taught many classes like this and it always surprises people to find that it *is actually possible* to relax into it, in less than ideal conditions in their busy work place. Imagine how nurturing it could feel and the inspiring role-model your service would be for clients, colleagues and related services?
 - **A regular class or course for clients** – some services have a set time for yoga and related classes or short-term courses. An ever changing client population comes through the yoga classes as an optional but advised part of their program or involvement in the service. Many yoga teachers have seen this sow seeds for real healing in people in residential and non-residential programs for post-natal depression, drug detox/rehab, mental health, criminal justice system, support

services for veterans, victims of torture, hospital wards, hospices, GP clinics, neighbourhood houses, schools and so on.

- **A regular mixed class** for clients and staff – some organisations find this an excellent vehicle to nurture both workers and clients, break down barriers, allow for people to just pop in to have a quick taste of yoga, work more creatively together, role-modelling. It can also be a good way to draw in external funding, keep numbers up if you're a small service or only have a few clients or workers ready to give it a go.

5. **INTEGRATE YOGA IN YOUR PROGRAMS** – many yoga teachers/schools can help you find ways to include simple yoga breathing, relaxation, meditation techniques and gentle stretches into your programs or sessions with those you serve.
6. **SUPPORT A PATHWAY TO LOCAL YOGA CLASSES.** Yoga is like counselling and only really effective if the motivation comes from within the person. So people need to find their own way to a class, in their own time. But there's no reason why you wouldn't smooth that path out a little. If your service actively nurtures a relationship with local yoga teachers/yoga therapists you might find they are interested in learning more about trauma and your wisdom, even to the point of formalised training. You might also find one or two who seem particularly sensitive and open or the odd class that is especially accessible, or suited to your service-users, that you can gently steer people towards.

Some yoga teachers make a special effort to create a community within/around their classes or school. Others aim to leave people in their own space and watch elements of community build up naturally. Either way there might be particular people within the classes or community who play welcoming roles and ease the way for people you refer. Many of us note the joy of connecting with like-minded people and the openness and serendipity that seem to come our way around yoga classes. [When I moved interstate I found a local yoga class that ended up providing me with a wonderful network – whenever I identified a lack or an unmet need in me or our family, it would turn out that someone within this yoga class or network would know exactly how to fill the gap.]

As you take any of these steps into Yoga may you feel welcomed, connected to and supported by Australia's diverse yoga community and may the following resources assist your path to balance and wholeness.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP - FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOGA ...

SOME INITIAL CONTACTS:

- ✚ **YOGA AUSTRALIA** – The over-arching professional body for Yoga teachers from all schools and traditions. The website is one way to locate yoga teachers near you.

www.yogaaustralia.org.au, Office Hours – M-F: 10am – 4pm EST

Ph. 1300 881 451, **Fax.** (03) 8676 4921, PO Box 346, Fitzroy VIC 3065, AUSTRALIA

Email. enquiries@yogaaustralia.org.au

- ✚ **AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF YOGA THERAPISTS (AAYT)** - An industry organisation which promotes professional standards and ongoing support for Australian Yoga Therapists. Their web site has a list of registered Yoga Therapists.

www.yogatherapy.org.au

- ✚ **GITA INTERNATIONAL YOGA** , Full-time Yoga school in Melbourne - on-line resources, books, DVDs, Relaxation CDs, base for the Guild of Gita trained teachers in various states and countries.

www.gita.com.au

Ph. (03) 9416 3272, **Fax.** (03) 9416 3347, 16 Hoddle St. Abbotsford, Vic 3067, AUSTRALIA

Email. gita@gita.com.au

- ✚ **LYNN ROMEO** - For further information on this presentation, or assistance if any of the above or below don't answer your questions.

Email. romeolynn@yahoo.com.au

SOME REFERENCES:

ARTICLES

'Yoga and Meditation – What Is the Active Ingredient?' Stephen Penman, in **Medicine Today**, July 2010, Vol 11, No. 7

'Sign of the Times: Results of the Yoga in Australia Survey', S. Penman, 2006,
www.yogasurvey.com

'Yoga and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An interview with Bessel van der Kolk, MD', in **Integral Yoga Magazine**, 2009

BOOKS

'Wings of Power' Margrit Segesman, 1973 & 1987, Hill of Content Publishing Co. For an understanding of Yogic breathing, meditation and relaxation and a glimpse at an amazing life story.

'Yoga For You: Gita Yoga in Theory and Practice', Lucille Wood with Di Lucas, 1994, Dolphin Press. An easy to read overview of yoga, Gita Yoga and its effects on our hormones. Clear illustrations and step by step instructions for 10 classic postures.

'8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery', Babette Rothschild, 2010, WW Norton

'The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment', Babette Rothschild, 2000, WW Norton & co.

WEB SITES

Yoga Australia www.yogaaustralia.org.au,

Gita International Yoga www.gita.com.au

Yoga In Australia Survey www.yogasurvey.com

Australian Association of Yoga Therapists www.yogatherapy.org.au

The Trauma Center www.traumacenter.org [The Trauma Centre in Boston, for articles, books, courses on Yoga and Trauma Recovery]