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ISSUE FIVE • SPRING 2020



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EDITOR'S LETTER

As we all know, the mind plays a central role in yoga. The following verse, taken from the Katha Upanishad, dated around 500 BCE, uses a nice analogy to describe the use of yoga to reach liberation:

**Know thou the soul as riding in a chariot,
The body as the chariot.
Know thou the intellect as the chariot driver,
and the mind as the reins.
The senses they say are the horses;
The objects of sense, what they range over.
He who has understanding,
Whose mind is constantly held firm -
His senses are under control,
Like the good horses of a chariot driver.
He who has understanding,
Who is mindful and ever pure,
reaches the goal
From which he is born no more.**

The image is specifically yogic: the harness, the reins, the driver and the horses are all related to 'yuj' to harness or yoke.

In this issue we take a look at the mind and some of the ways we can use it to our benefit. One of the issues raised, perhaps controversially, is whether drugs are a valid way to explore the mind and the nature of consciousness.

We kick off this issue interviewing the wonderful Danny Paradise, a free spirit who has had an enormous influence in spreading the popularity of yoga. Danny's response to the question on the use of yoga and psychedelics is both insightful and wise. I suggest revisiting Danny's interview after reading through the articles, to gain perspective.

Jason Silva's article discusses the fascinating idea that we can intentionally program psychedelic experiences by context and setting, giving us the ability to affect our own consciousness. We can steer awareness towards transformation and revelation.

Jason also introduces the concept of the 'flow state' and this is further discussed in Sarah Ramsden's article on training mindfulness and mindflow. Mindflow is described as a state where time and the sense of self vanish, leading to total absorption and transcendence. If there are analogies to be drawn between religious experiences and 'peak performance,' flow,' or 'being in the zone,' it should perhaps come as no surprise that athletes perceive their chosen sport as nothing short of a sacred enterprise.

Elliot Cohen raises some of the issues surrounding the

authenticity of drug-related spiritual experiences. Is the psychedelic experience just a simulation of transcendence? Can we access spiritual states without any of the usual spiritual observances or preliminary practices typically required within the world's wisdom traditions?

'Instant Enlightenment' looks at possible shared mechanisms at the cellular level between meditation and psychedelics. Although it is impossible to scale up these findings to the level of a complete biological system, it does prompt the question: is it all just brain chemistry? From a western perspective, consciousness is something to be found in the mind, whereas from an eastern perspective, and certainly Vedantic philosophy, consciousness exists beyond the mind. In Vedanta, the mind is considered as matter and one of the senses; consciousness is however all-pervasive, omnipresent and omniscient. Whether these two philosophies can be reconciled remains to be seen.

As always, a huge thank you to all our contributors for making this another thought-provoking and stimulating issue of Amrita.

BRIAN COOPER PhD



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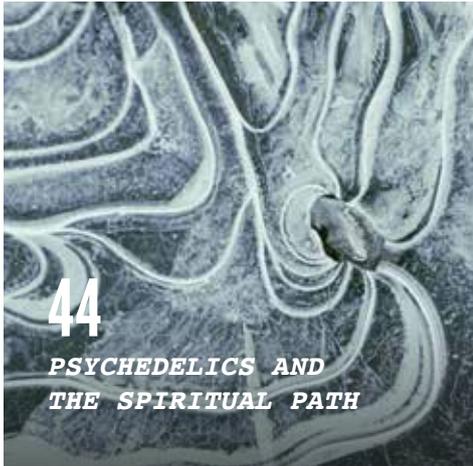
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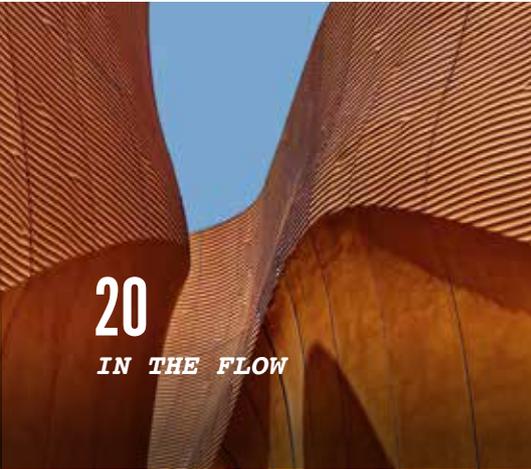
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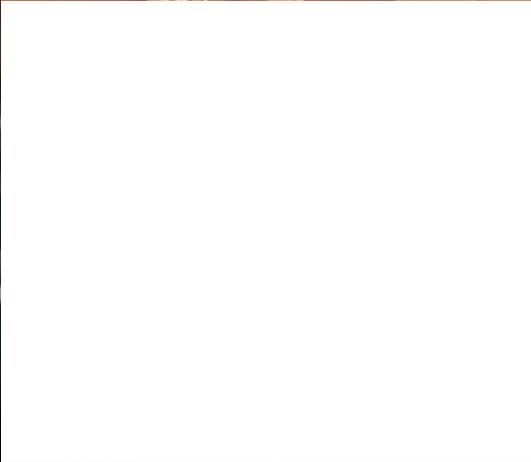
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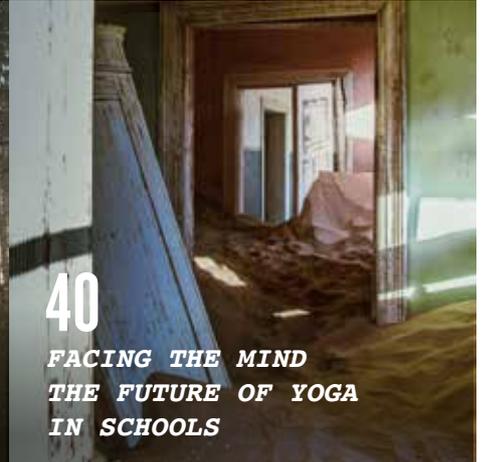


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FROM PASSION TO PROFESSION

AMRITA

ISSUE FIVE

EDITOR

[Brian Cooper, PhD](#)

brian@yogaallianceprofessionals.org

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

[Melissa Albarran](#)

Melissa@yogaalliance.co.uk

DESIGNER

[Louise Robinson](#)

info@sevenstreetscreatives.com

ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

[Melissa Albarran](#)

Melissa@yogaalliance.co.uk

CONCEPTUAL DESIGNER

[Louise Wallace](#)

louise@yogaallianceprofessionals.org

CONTRIBUTORS

[Danny Paradise](#), [Jason Silva](#), [Sarah Ramsden](#), [Jessica Lawrence](#), [Dr Brian Cooper](#), [Louise Wallace](#), [Charlotta Martinus](#), [Dr Elliot Cohen](#), [Bassanti Pathak](#), [Lucy Parker](#), [Dr Jason Birch](#), [Charlotte Watts](#), [Carol Murphy](#)

PUBLISHER

[Yoga Alliance Professionals](#)

10 Beaverhall Road, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

www.yogaallianceprofessionals.org

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INTERVIEW WITH DANNY PARADISE

You come across as a free spirit, teaching yoga and travelling around the world. Do you think non-attachment is key to a happy life?

I do love to travel. I made my first journey around the world when I was 19 years old. I even came to Edinburgh on that trip and explored other areas of Scotland. I had my 20th birthday on the Isle of Skye... I recognised that year that there was a luminous and yet somewhat invisible trail around the world and you could jump on it at any time... like a conveyor belt! Years later when I learnt yoga that was a beautiful tool to allow me to travel again and come into communities around the world to pass on the teachings I had learned. Also, I play music so that was the way I had made my way around the world the first time. It fits quite well with Yoga...People are interested in Yoga everywhere and also they love music...I was early in learning the practices in the West and met old and new friends all over the world who invited me to come to introduce the teachings... As far as non-attachment...well it's different for everyone. I didn't live anywhere for many years but I suppose I was still attached to Yoga, music, the things in my luggage... I didn't need to live anywhere. I've been on the move for the last 43 years.

There's a story from the Upanishads as told by Joseph Campbell. An old crotchety Yogi came into the court of Indra - one of the Kings of the Gods- Indra was on a bit of an ego trip as he had just killed a monster named Vrtra with a thunderbolt and had saved the Earth and Universe. So Indra decided to build the biggest palace of all the Gods... The old Yogi is just wearing a waistband, and he has an umbrella made of banana leaves over his head. On his chest is a little circle of hairs with a bald spot in the middle. A boy in the court next to Indra saw him he asked what Indra was thinking... 'Hey old man, who are you, what's your name, where's your family and where's your home? What is the circle of hairs on your chest?' The old Yogi answered, 'I don't have a family and I don't live anywhere...Life is too short to have a house...This parasol

is good enough for me... I just worship Vishnu. As for these hairs on my chest, it's curious...Every time an Indra dies one hair drops out. Half of them are gone now. Pretty soon they'll all be gone...Why build a house?' When Indra heard that story he cancelled the finishing of his palace. He also left his wife, moved into the forest and became a Yogi.

I could really relate to that story, especially that 'life is too short to have a house'. Later I was invited to share a piece of land on a remote tropical island and it seemed like a very good idea. I like the Native American teaching of 'pick a sacred place and live in it!' However, I still travel most of the year teaching, playing music and exploring the world. It is a great privilege to be able to travel and of course, also teach yoga...I do like having a place to keep some books and musical instruments...Can I break all attachments? Not yet...but I can live simply and just use what I need... In the end, it's all impermanence and we have to recognise that and get ready for it in the best way we can. There's no choice. In the end, we will lose everything except our soul! So we will be in a state of non-attachment no matter what...

Do you have any creative projects on the go as you travel?

I'm constantly writing songs, recording new music and films as well as helping raise awareness of human trafficking around the world, in particular, child trafficking. I also travel with my girlfriend Nadia who is a brilliant singer and musician so we record and perform together. Concerning trafficking, I became involved with an amazing project in Thailand called 'Children of the Forest'. This is a beautiful bamboo village in the North-West Thailand area of Sangklaburi. This is an area of Thailand near the Burmese border that is notorious for child and adult trafficking for forced labour or prostitution. 150 children live at the village, go to school on the property and are protected, fed, clothed and housed. 250 children from the surrounding area come for lunch



and school each day to Children of the Forest. There are also outreach programs that support another 400 or 500 children. It's very beautiful and they are demonstrating a solution for displaced, stateless children (and adults) who exist on the borders all over the world. At Children of the Forest, the children learn skills that will make them valuable to society. It's an amazing solution to the refugee situation worldwide. Over 2 million Burmese people have crossed into Thailand without identity papers. They are not allowed to work or travel even from out of their province. And each day dozens or more are kidnapped and taken to factories or as sex workers never to be seen again. So COF provides desperately needed protection and nurturing of children in the area. I was invited there by my friends Matthew and Mary Kelly who have helped support COF since it's inception. Daniel Hopson - a social worker from the UK created 'Children of the Forest.' I taught yoga to the kids there and we played music for them as well. We also made an animated film about the situation to my song 'Love Will Rescue You' that was presented at the United Nations in New York in 2015 in a program about 'Endangered Children Worldwide'. People can see that film if they search 'Love Will Rescue You' by Danny Paradise and Matthew Kelly on YouTube. We had amazingly talented artists, photographers and musicians





from all over the world participate in this production. The animator, Céu D'Ellia, has been the animation director for Steven Spielberg and Walt Disney feature films. I'm also finishing a series of 16 recordings with friends from around the world.

You have had a strong connection to the music world, working with top musicians and creative artists such as Sting, Pearl Jam, Paul Simon, Madonna, Pavarotti, Chris Botti - the list is long - how closely linked do you think yoga and music are?

I suppose my connection to these artists comes because I've been playing music and performing my whole life as well. I met Sting through Dominic Miller, whom I recorded with in London and Cairo in the '80s, and began teaching him yoga in 1990. Dominic has been recording and performing with Sting since 1989.

All successful artists, especially those who tour the world, recognise that if they want to maintain their success they have to stay on top of their health, vitality, clarity and talent. So then they have to stay healthy through their own effort. All these artists, after being exposed to yoga, clearly saw how much the practice could boost their immune system and energy. Singers in particular love the focus yoga places on deep breath, like pranayama for example. Sting has mentioned in interviews how yoga increased his vocal abilities and strength. Yoga is also known for expanding vision, intuition and insight...all these qualities are brilliant for artists in all fields.

In this issue of Amrita, we have delved into the influence medicinal plants and drugs have on developing one's spiritual development and personal growth. Do you think that mind altering substances are a substitute for traditional techniques, or can be used alongside?

There are many opinions of this on all sides. From my experience and travels I feel that yoga is an integral part of Shamanic technologies. It's all soul work. Yoga takes effort and effort is rewarded. People have accessed these different techniques for the same reasons whether it is in the world of yoga, or Native American sweat lodges, drumming circles, chanting ceremonies, magical plant ceremonies, sun dance, vision quest, aboriginal walkabout, music etc. All the techniques recognise nature as the spiritual teacher and they are designed to access nature to help create a healing force and awareness in the psyche and body. All Shamanic practices are designed to nurture evolutionary consciousness. Also the practices are there to help people learn to communicate with the Spirit in whichever ways work for them... If you trace the origins of yoga from mythology it seems that the yogic practices developed through meditative communication with nature in Shamanic ceremonies. Some people feel the practices of yoga grew out of these meditative communications to teach individuals to have the same awareness, knowledge and healing force as different practices that were coming out of all Indigenous cultures throughout the world. The Sufi's say 'There's as many roads as there are souls of men.' So there are as many paths to God as there are individuals. We design our own means of communicating with the Spirit. To me yoga nurtures personal responsibility and personal authority as well as recognising we can communicate with the Spirit any time without the intermediary, the guru, the priest. All it takes is sitting quietly and creating the space and time to ask for guidance to speak with Nature, and stepping outside of the rational mind.

When people need other options to truly heal then sometimes they may choose the very strong routes of plant medicines. This is not recreational. Though yoga is called 'The Technology of Ecstasy' and Shamanism can be defined as the 'The Ecstatic Ways of Knowing' this does not mean you enter ecstatic states without great effort. It takes work and effort to awaken, to heal and to communicate with your soul and the Great Soul. Often it also takes

understanding the nature of death. This is a barrier for all who wish to enter these ceremonies. Everything rises to the surface in all Shamanic explorations, including yoga. All imbalances, all our demons and the skeletons we have in our closest come screaming to the surface. Just as they may very well do at death. This requires incredible concentration and effort to come to terms with. All these paths walk the razor edge. Then after the work of facing our unfinished business we may be lucky enough to enter into ecstatic states of awareness.

The Shamans of the Amazon say that Ayahuasca was created for everybody but not everybody was created for Ayahuasca. If people are taking MAOI pharmaceutical medicines like anti-depressants, asthma or diet medication they can have a stroke or die during a ceremony. People with mental illness or a close family member with mental illness are at risk also.

So it takes a particular person and a particular condition to want to choose this path. Then it must only be accessed through recommended guides, just as yoga should only be studied with experienced, gentle teachers who nurture independence and freedom and not cliques or cults. These techniques and ancestral suggestions are helping to lead us to mastery without following any masters. Even the Buddha said 'you are your only master.' After all, yoga is simply a very informed suggestion and gift for the human race from an ancient source. The original Yogi Shamans understood the sacred nature of existence and

the temporary gift of the human body. Many of the songs of the Vedas are similar to the chants of the Amazonian Shaman.

The Shipibo Indians of Peru have a particularly concentrated knowledge that is based on plant diets. The Jungle Doctor or Shaman will prescribe for patients for anywhere from a few days to 120 days or longer in isolation before they participate in an ayahuasca ceremony for example. There is a beautiful contemporary movie from 2016 called 'The Last Shaman' by the Italian director Raz Degan that follows an American university student from Vermont to Peru. The student was severely depressed and suicidal. He researched healing for depression around the world and discovered the Shamans of Peru. He decides he will give himself 11 months to heal through the recommendations of the Shamans or he will kill himself. The movie follows his real journey as he does a 120 day isolation diet guided by a Shipibo Indian Shaman before he will let him participate in an ayahuasca ceremony.

The real Native traditions of healing have a very powerful lineage of knowledge of the plants of the forests. Just like the origins of the creators of yoga are called the Jungle Doctors so are the Shamans of the Amazon. These traditions are connected by an invisible strand all around the world. The original yogis knew the plant medicines as well and certainly originally participated in Shamanic ceremonies and practiced the 8 Limbs of Yoga. A drumming circle, painting, playing music or a silent

meditation may work just as well for someone else. Not one path is for everybody.

You have talked before about being a 'spiritual warrior', can you expand on this? Have you met many genuine Shamans on your travels?

I like these two definitions by the Native Americans for 'Spiritual Warrior'...'A Spiritual Warrior is someone who uses their life force to create a world of balance and harmony for coming generations...on a continuous basis.' And...'A Spiritual Warrior is someone who puts energy into something that helps heal the earth and restores the balance consistently.' These definitions are straight forward and clear. Do whatever you can to make the world a better place for our children and their children... We are responsible for the future. That may mean teaching meditation and yoga to children, or working in an organic garden, or in an old age home or a hospital, or bringing yoga and meditation to friends and family... Anything that creates a positive, healthful force.

I have had the great fortune of meeting a handful of Shamans who I really felt were carrying some ancient knowledge and force. But what they created mostly was a safe space so one could have their own experience whether in a Temescal (sweat lodge), drumming/chanting circles or plant medicine ceremony. Most knew the ancient songs, chants and contemporary songs that call in ancestral energies for protection and guidance. They had great humility, gentleness and humor. They all are also either great musicians or very interested in music as well.

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in life?

Perhaps the biggest lessons I have learnt is that the Spirit is love and compassion and the now is the most important moment...So there is nothing to fear, nothing to worry about and only love waiting on the other side of death and impermanence. Yoga, as well as all spiritual traditions...whether it is American Indian or a Mongolian, Mayan, Hawaiian or Aboriginal Shaman or teachers of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc...all know at the heart of their teachings that there is only unconditional love, joy and compassion to guide us on our path...And when we tap into that energy we can instantly reach divine peace and tranquility no matter what our circumstances. All our work, especially with the coming generations as time goes by, will be honoring, preserving, protecting and restoring nature.





HACKING THE TRIPPING MIND: A FANTASTIC VOYAGE THROUGH INNER SPACE

Almost fifty years ago, ex-Harvard professor Timothy Leary and his colleagues penned an essay titled “On Programming Psychedelic Experiences.”

Essentially, the article served as a field manual for navigating awareness during altered states of consciousness, a kind of map to help orient and manage subjectivity, a voyage chart to focus the attention of a tripping mind.

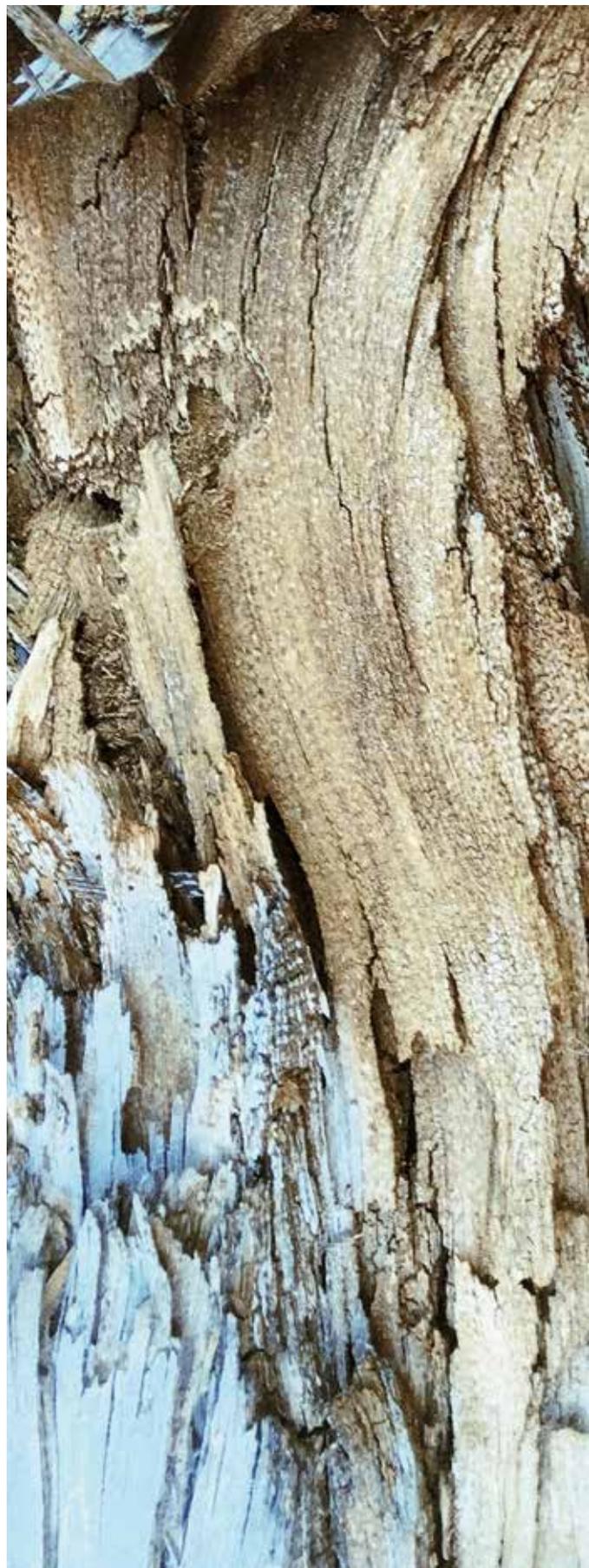
Set and setting

The basic premise was that if you could carefully curate the environment, and then pattern, sequence, and control the set of stimuli that individuals would be exposed to while under the influence of a mind-altering chemical or plant, you could orient awareness towards useful spaces of mind. You could, for example, willingly induce positive and cathartic, transformational experiences.

Psychedelic plants have been ingested in all kinds of sacred rituals, by all kinds of cultures, for millennia, and yet remain largely misunderstood by the mainstream today.

While their effects can vary, there seems to be consensus that these substances evoke a period of increased reactivity or sensitivity to the flood of sense impressions coming in. Darwin’s Pharmacy author, Professor Richard Doyle, following psychologist Stanislav Grof, calls psychedelics non-specific amplifiers of consciousness whose effects are “extraordinarily sensitive to the initial rhetorical conditions” in which we take them.

What this means, as Leary explains, is that the subjective effects of psychedelics and marijuana are “user-constructed,” in that the initial conditions of the experience, both environmental and psychological, feedback into the subjective experience of the trip itself. Leary condensed this feedback effect in the notion of “set and setting,” which has remained a widely accepted heuristic by psychedelic explorers for fifty years.





Attention

When we speak about subjectivity we speak about attention. Attention is the hinge between conscious control and the patterns of reactivity that have already been set up by the psychological system or the environment (the now ubiquitous set and setting). Attention is at the centre of consciousness. Author and psychedelic explorer Diana Slattery has written that the capture and control of attention is “a necessary condition for any interpersonal persuasion, education, or entertainment to occur.”

“Attention,” wrote Darwin, “if sudden and close, graduates into surprise; and this into astonishment; and this into stupefied amazement.” Control attention, control consciousness. Again, the way that these psychedelic substances mediate awareness and attention means that the environment and context end up informing the nature of the experience: The increased suggestibility of the user makes the set and setting crucial and delicate— and thus should be choreographed beforehand and planned accordingly.

This focus is crucial not just to altered states of consciousness but also to ordinary consciousness, and by working on attention through techniques such as mindfulness and self-inquiry, we can alter not only psychedelic experience, but experience itself!

Feedback loops, design, and cybernetic minds

So here's what we have so far:

- A) Psychedelic experiences are extremely sensitive to the context (ie: set and setting) in which we experience them.
- B) We can program these experiences by intentionally curating the “set” and “setting” in which we ingest them.
- C) Appreciating just how profoundly this sensitivity to set and setting can shape the texture (and “reality”) of a psychedelic experience, can give us insight into the nature of how “design” affects the mind, even in a non-psychedelic state. We are talking about feedback loops between mind and “world.”

Anne-Marie Willis calls the pervasive, mind-sculpting nature of these loops, (and of design in general), “Ontological Design.” The concept is fairly simple but the feedback loops are all-encompassing: essentially all of the things that we design and that surround us, from our language, to our dwellings, our cities, tools, aircrafts, bedrooms, kitchens, and religions, design us back. It all feeds back.

Design is pervasive: what we design is designing us. Author Steven Johnson echoed the same idea: “Our thoughts shape our spaces and our spaces return the favor.” What we construct, what we architect, architects us in return. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan: “We build the tools and then they build us.” Here it is again: We are being





designed by that which we have designed. As McKenna said: WE BECOME WHAT WE BEHOLD.

The question is whether we are aware that this is happening. The truth is we are likely not paying attention. What psychedelics can do, then, says Rich Doyle, is they can make us aware of these “feedback loops between our creative choices—and our consciousness.” And thus of “the tremendous freedom we have in creating our own experience.” Leary called this “internal freedom.”

Again: Using psychedelics to aid in both perceiving and understanding the effects of language, music, architecture, and culture on our consciousness, can offer an awareness of the degree to which we have the “ability to affect our own consciousness through our linguistic and creative choices.” We learn how our choices determine our fate. I design therefore I become.

**// WE CAN UNTANGLE OURSELVES FROM OUR MAPS,
WE CAN DECOUPLE OUR MINDS FROM REFLEXIVE
PATTERNS, AND CREATE NEW PATTERNS //**

Steering Awareness

Because Psychedelics heighten perception almost immediately, users quickly shake off the deadening effects of habit. Users may also temporarily lose their inhibitions as well as their ability to filter out or ignore certain stimuli, finding themselves extremely open to novel perceptions that may lead to unexpected observations, connections, serendipities, insights, and epiphanies. Properly setting the environment of the “tripper” therefore, can serve as a modulator for those insights.

Pay attention to this notion because understanding this point is crucial to the entire argument of programming these experiences: the extreme “suggestibility” and “openness” of the user during a psychedelic state means that one’s measured choices of “set and setting” could be utterly transformational. The idea is that one can literally “steer” awareness towards transformative encounters and ecstatic revelations. There have been accounts of how a single Ketamine trip will cure even the most extreme cases of depression. This suggests that through the careful use of these substances, informed by scientific, medical, and shamanic knowledge, our stubborn defence mechanisms, and our thick-skinned ego-identity, is dissolved, enabling a meta programming of the software of our being.

Bliss Junkies

In his book on shamanism, the historian of religion Mircea Eliade described various “techniques of ecstasy” that essentially helped mediate our encounters with the sacred.

Though Eliade was critical of and misinformed about psychedelics, numerous scholars make the case that the origins of many of the world's religions are richly embedded in the ritualized use of these sacraments, along with other techniques of ecstasy such as chanting, fasting, drumming, dance and meditation, all of which can act as passports to the numinous.

Today we are seeing a renaissance in the study of these plants and chemicals. Organisations like MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) are working with researchers and governments to investigate the therapeutic potential of medicines such as MDMA, or Ecstasy, which is being used to alleviate such psychological problems as PTSD, Depression, and many other ailments. The results have been staggering.

Johns Hopkins University recently administered psilocybin, the active chemical in magic mushrooms, to patients dealing with terminal illness. The effects seemed to reconfigure their entire perception of death, giving them peace.

Beyond psychedelics: flow states, superfocus and living your bliss

Moving beyond the psychedelic experience there is the question of integration, the takeaway so to speak. We've gotten the message, processed the insights, and now what? Many artists, musicians and elite athletes who have found their way, (with or without psychedelics), talk about "the flow state," a kind of super-focused "zone" associated with extreme virtuosity, creativity, and "no-mind"; a state

of ultimate performance where passion and skill meets the opportunity to express itself. This highly-sought after modality is as elusive as you might expect, yet recent advances in our understanding of the chemistry of lived experience are allowing us to peek beneath the lid, so to speak.

Rise of Superman author Steven Kotler and his partner Jamie Wheal co-founded the Flow Genome Project which is working with Fortune 500 companies to teach employees to get into Theta-wave brain states, typical of meditating monks, achieving non-dual states and supercharging their focus and subjectivity. They say that flow states silence "our inner critic," allowing us to get out of our own way and transcend our self-imposed limitations, dubbed by author Gary Weber the "happiness beyond thought."

In his recent TEDx talk "Altered States to Altered Traits: Hacking Your Flow State," Jamie Wheal says that our self-systems are like colanders, constantly emptying, and we can't seem to sustain these flow states. He says, "It's easier than ever to get high and it's as hard as it's always been to stay that way...we get hooked on the state instead of raising the stage."

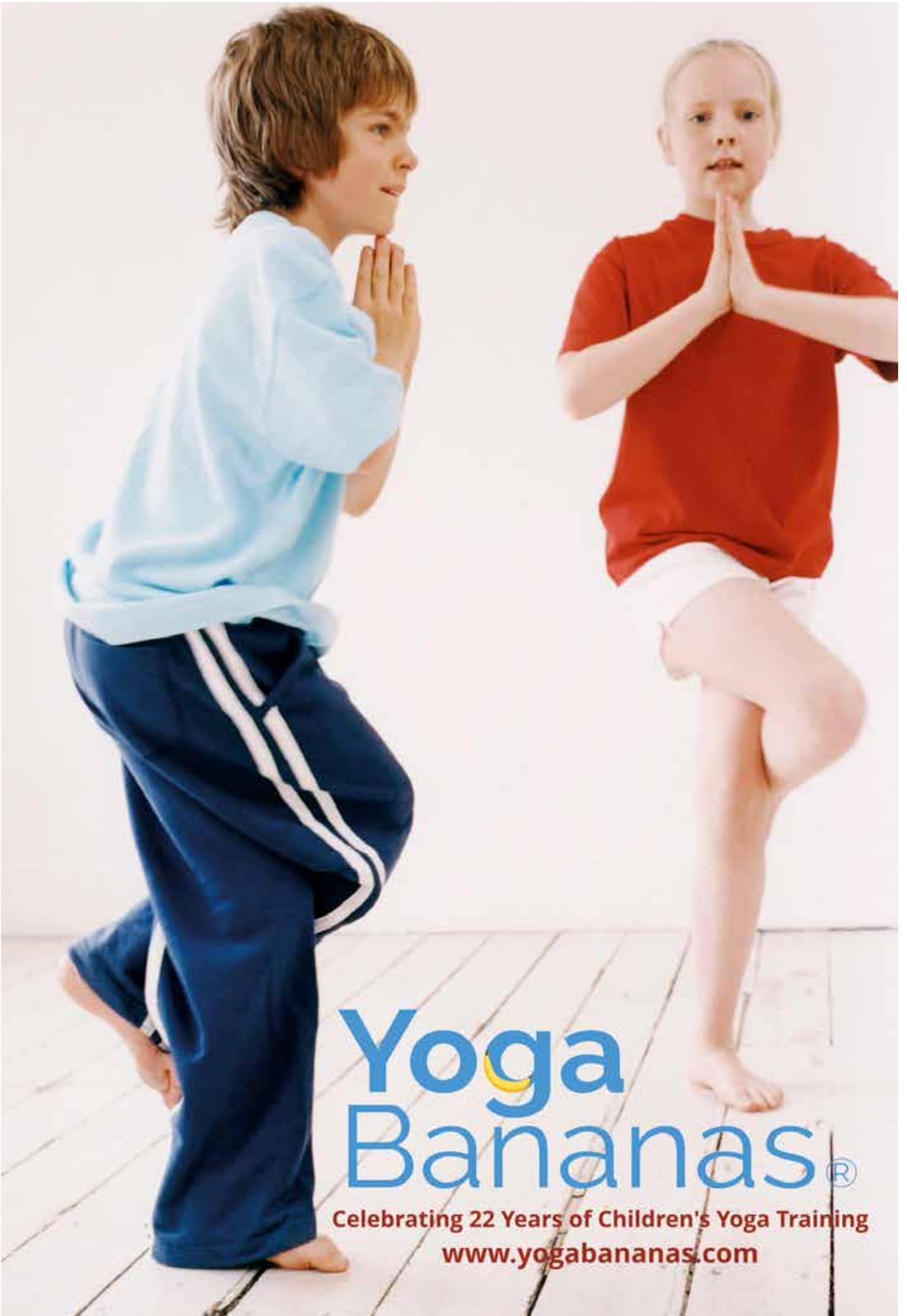
Practices of mindfulness such as meditation, curating our environment, and self-inquiry are the next step for many to "raise their stage," but the Flow Genome Project brings a technological focus to states of flow. By leveraging the latest brain-mapping technologies and insights into neurochemistry and behaviour, Kotler and Wheal have developed a program to supercharge flow states and decipher the science of human performance.

JASON SILVA

Jason Silva is an Emmy-nominated and world renown TV personality, storyteller, filmmaker, and sought-after keynote speaker and futurist. A global keynote speaker, Jason has given talks at events for Microsoft, Intel, Cisco, Oracle, Adobe, Electronic Arts, Cannes Lions, Tribeca Film Festival, National Geographic, Discovery Channel, 20th Century Fox, Cosmopolitan, PHD Worldwide, Google Zeitgeist, TED Global, The Economist, and more.

Instagram: @JasonLSilva

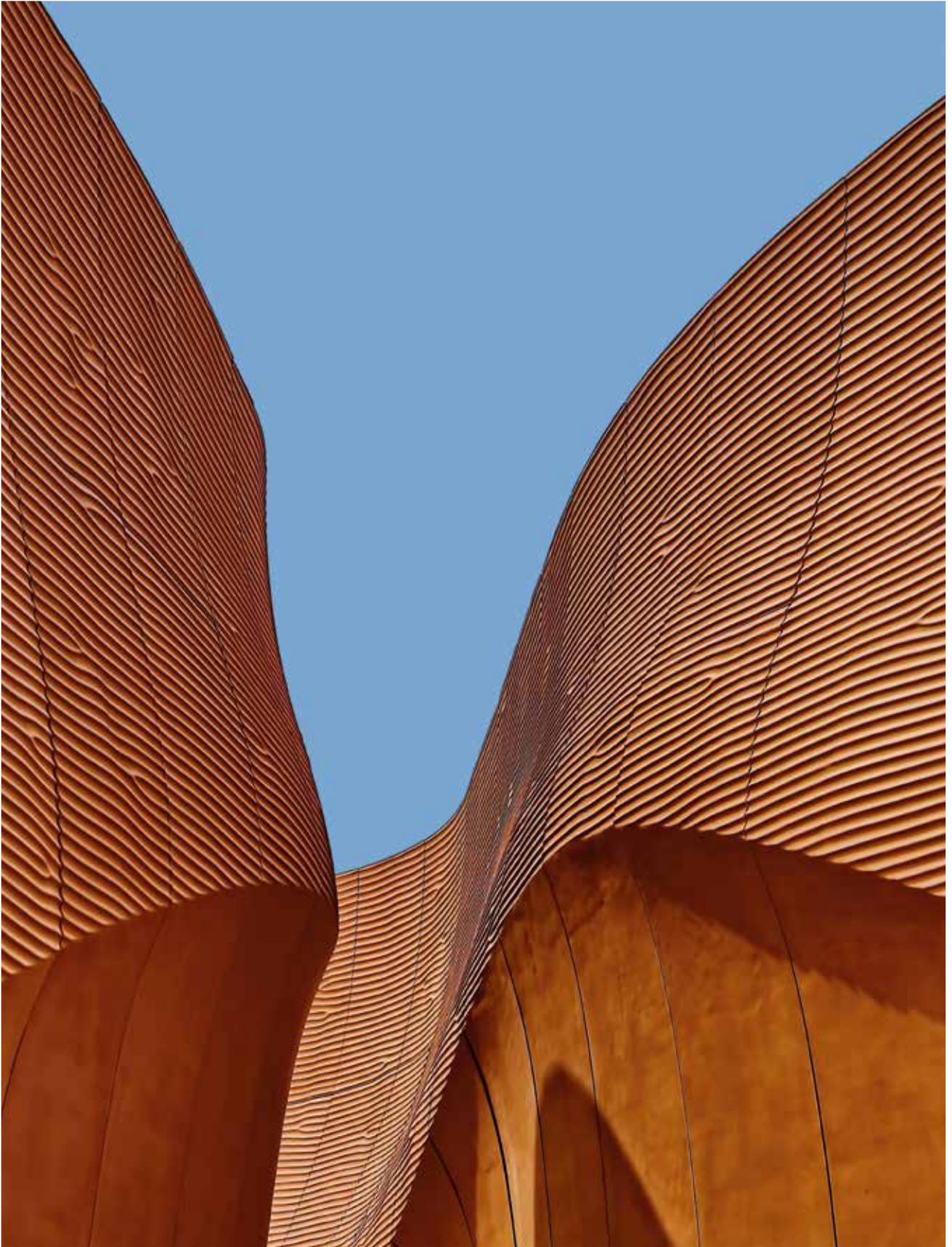
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IN THE FLOW

A Footballer's Guide to Ego, Non-Duality and Transcendence

Sergio Aguero (Manchester City Football Club LEGEND) knows all about non-duality. When he scored THAT goal against Queen's Park Rangers in 2012 to win the Premier League for MCFC for the first time in 30 years, he was beyond time, space, self and frontal-cortex cognition. He was in QPR's box and there were at least 15 guys moving tight between him and the goal in the 95th minute with seconds of the game to go. Picking a shot through that should have been impossible. But he just knew: 'This was it, the one chance I'd hoped would come. So I hit the ball as hard as I could.' Next thing: 'I remember seeing the ball hit the back of the net.' He did not know how he was going to do it, he did not know he had done it until it was over. He just did it with no consciousness of the doing.

Mindfow: no sense of time, of separation, of self. Only the intense, utterly absorbed joy of the doing and extraordinary, seemingly impossible human performance.

Shawn Greene, Major League Baseball 'Absorbed in the act, there was only this: the ball came at me and I hit it... there was no me, no him, no bat, no ball. All nouns were gone, leaving only one verb: to hit.'

Mindfulness & Performance

Mindfulness and performance has been researched A LOT (often in a sport context because there's money in improving sports' performance, and sporting outcomes are really easy to measure). But, the yogi in you cries, isn't this just meditation? Maybe, maybe not. To the scientific research community, there are as many definitions of meditation as practitioners, and absolutely no consensus about exactly what your brain chemistry is doing. So in terms of research, using the less controversial (and well defined) term Mindfulness makes life a whole lot easier. You take your pick.

Mindfulness is defined as an exercise in focused awareness. Non-judgemental awareness of awareness

even. A controlled mental focus resulting in being present with an activity (to the general exclusion of other thoughts) yet still aware of the being present. Importantly in terms of research, it is a left-brain frontal cortex activity. Your executive command and control area is still in charge. Mindfulness & Performance – it works!

Research into Olympic rowers, college rowers, competition cyclists and national BMX team, junior elite footballers, basketball shooters, elite golfers...showed increases in relaxation, confidence, goal orientation, optimism, awareness, concentration, sense of control, adaptive emotional regulation, resilience, effectiveness of training, recovery, sleep quality, performance, synchronicity of technique, enjoyment of the sport, general life satisfaction.

Training Mindfulness & Performance

You as a yoga teacher are well-placed to train others in mindfulness – and remember when we talk of performance, we mean any creative form, sport, business and just running life itself! The knack here is to get it broken down into bite-sized pieces. Remember, you wanted to become a yogi (including a desire to meditate) and that was your pursuit. Sergio Aguero does not want to be a yogi, he wants to be a better footballer, so he doesn't want to meditate. The stuff that works in the research is in itsy-little bits of a few minutes made relevant to the individual's pursuit: body awareness, breath awareness, thought-watching / non-attachment, self-compassion, befriending the inner critic and negative feelings, responding not reacting.

So if you are interested in training the mindfulness-performance thing, keep it simple, relevant, short, repetitive, and very, very incremental. There is a reason why Headspace has sold millions more downloads than any traditional meditation app. Use your clients' context and language - with the footballers, I use the context of recovery (super important for them), make it about them,

their bodies and their games, their language.

Flow, Baby, Flow

In terms of performance, its like zone plus the one extraordinary challenge you've spent your whole life training for. In terms of yoga it is the difference between say pratyahara / dharana and samadhi (well, maybe).

Flow is defined for research as including these 9 facets: a clear challenge with defined outcome; trust in your training and ability; absolute merging of action and awareness; integration of external feedback (about what's happening) and internal response; non-thinking absorption in the doing; spatial transformation; time transformation; loss of sense of self / separation from the doing; joyful, blissful, autotelic.

Flow is a feeling state, not a thinking awareness state. Unlike mindfulness, it is right brain (for most of us) not a left -brain state. In terms of our brain chemistry, it is hypofrontality – in flow the left brain frontal cortex shuts down (executive control, awareness, mental focus, mindfulness) and the right feeling and doing centres light up! At the neurotransmitter level (orchestrating our feeling-states), adrenaline and cortisol drop (so in Flow we are less flight-flighty); norepinephrine surges giving faster perceptual processing and clarity; dopamine rises (just like in addiction) giving focused, desire-driven action; serotonin brings a calm expansiveness; and the opiates – endorphins and anadamine (yes, that is a yogic name) block pain, and open up the floodgates of joy, bliss, connection and non-separation.

// IF MINDFULNESS IS AWARENESS, MINDFLOW – OR FLOW STATE – IS TRANSCENDENCE //

Getting to Flow

Lots of research on Flow enhancing performance. But obviously you can't think your way into Flow. Ain't going to happen. Mindfulness appears to optimise your chances of getting into Flow better than other interventions. So again good for us as yoga teachers as we can do mindfulness. By dampening our inner mental banging-on, mindfulness seems to create space for moving into Flow. So those practising mindfulness record increased Flow moments.

Beyond Mindfulness, our best shot at getting ourselves and others into Flow is recreating the feeling of it: the pure joy, the beautiful flowing ability, the absolute loss of self, the joyous merging into blissful doing, the love of it – no driven-ness, no fighting, no fear. This is a right-brain, non-dual, ego-less, non-separation remembered feeling state

In the context of performance, right-brain feeling-state 'meditations' seem to optimise for Flow and enhanced, even extraordinary performance. So this would be feeling-state meditations that recreate the feeling of Flow – the joy, the absorption, the effortless ability. And central to this experience is connecting with bliss, calm expanded connectedness and love. Amazingly in the end, it is love that drives performance.

So maybe yogis and footballers aren't that far apart! Like Sergio Aguero, maybe all athletes know about transcendence already and for them performance is just a way of returning to that place of utter non-ego joy and love. Here's a few that recognised it:

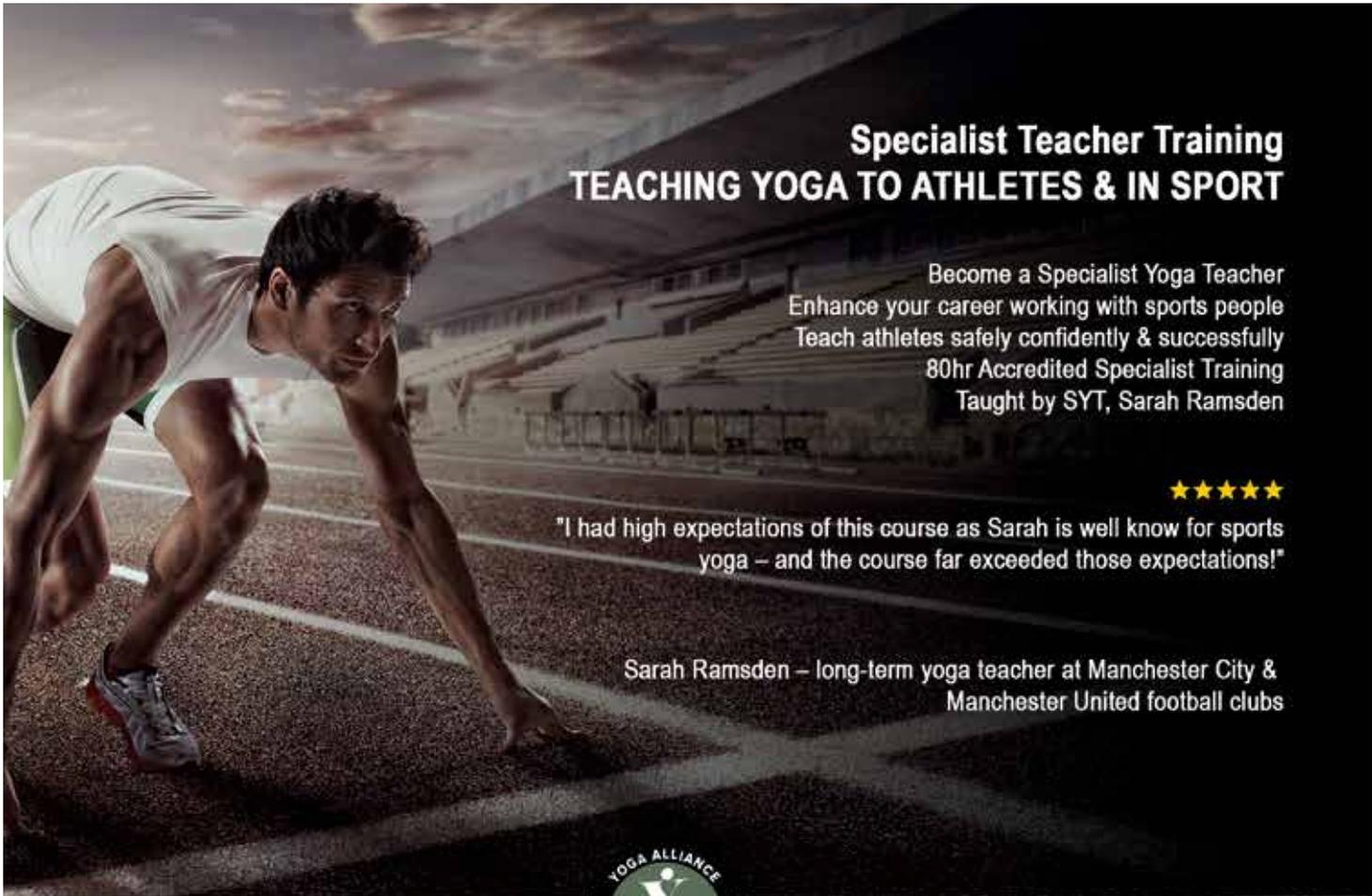
'I love winning. I can take losing. But most of all I love to play.' Boris Becker, tennis champion

'Somewhere behind the athlete you've become, and the hours of practice and the coaches who have pushed you, is a little girl who fell in love with the game. Play for her.' Mia Hamm, US Olympic & World Soccer champion

SARAH RAMSDEN

Sarah is a Senior Yoga Teacher, an advanced teacher trainer, and holds a MSc in Sports Science in addition to many other movement disciplines. She has worked in professional football for 13 years, including 11 years at Manchester City & Manchester United football clubs with their senior, youth and academy players. Sarah is passionate about using yoga-inspired training in sport, and draws from her extensive knowledge of functional anatomy, traditional yoga, sports science, pilates, fascial connection & many other movement and mental disciplines.

Her advanced teacher training includes: The Body Athletic – Teaching Yoga to Athletes & in Sport (YAP accredited vocational training); and The Body Aligned – Yoga, Functional Anatomy & Injury. www.sportsyoga.co.uk



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WORDS OF YOGA

To the Classical Greeks Homer was already a myth, his words settled as canonical poetry. This reverence for the poetic power of his epics shifted into a belief in the physical power that his words could bring; by the Late Antique period lyrical snatches of Homer were being used as magical charms. Magical handbooks of the period record how Homeric verses, when chanted aloud, provided healing and protection. Homer also influenced a school of philosophy that believed his epics had absorbed divine essence from "The One", from which all emanates and all returns, and that through their recitation we might have a chance of reconnection with this divine essence. All of this is to say that the power of great literature can be felt in more than just an appreciation of an expert composition of words but that contained within them is a sense of something far more encompassing and expansive. In yoga we practice an awareness of the niyamas, the work we all must do on our own characters and sense of self: purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study, and surrender. Through turning our minds in we can, through these personal practices of our inner world, begin to find that space in our centre bounded by nothing but our limitless minds, that is the space in which meditation begins. I use literature in my teaching for this reason, the messages contained within the books and

poems I choose carry not only a philosophical message of their own but also aid in tapping into a more meditative state crystallised around an intention that the words, more eloquent than anything I could ever say, convey.

Just as we chant mantras, or even just sound out a-u-m, the quotations I weave into my classes contain power in their messages as well as the mind-stilling cadences of their sounds. Even when translated from the Ancient Greek the rhythm of the verses of Antigone hums through, posing the question of whether it is right to defy our justice system if it contravenes a personal obligation. The famed seer Teiresias tells us that:

'All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.'

Referring to Creon's obstinacy in seeing his course through we see how Antigone becomes Creon's Hubris, or pride, made manifest. By posing this question Sophocles invites the audience to engage in the niyama svadhyaya, self-study, and not to refuse all arguments as Creon does to his detriment. Pride and power, who has them and how they are used, are eternal themes. A yoga practice can help us to learn contentment and pride in what we

have and to be aware of the pitfalls of hungering after what we don't have and perhaps have not earned. This is partly encapsulated in the *niyama santosha*, which is often interpreted as comfort but rather should be viewed as tapping into that part of ourselves that can sit still and resist the temptation of material striving. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and those in his sphere learned that lesson far too late and filling the studio, after a strong heart opening practice, with the witch's admonition for aiding such pride and selfishness calls students' minds inwards to that meditative place of introspection and self-questioning:

**'And, which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you.'**

Peter Matthiessen, a naturalist, writer, and Zen Buddhist, lost his wife to cancer and embarked on a trek in the Himalayas that resulted in his most famous work, *The Snow Leopard*. The snow leopard is an elusive inhabitant of the mountains and although this is set up to be an adventure of exploration of healing in the natural world, it is in fact a journey inwards for Matthiessen, a contention with his grief and acceptance of what is and not what he wishes to be. This book carries surrender, the *niyama ishvara pranidhana*, at its heart. The essential necessity of

surrendering to what is and glorying in that instance rings through each icy, windswept passage:

'The secret of the mountain is that the mountains simply exist, as I do myself: the mountains exist simply, which I do not. The mountains have no "meaning," they are meaning; the mountains are. The sun is round. I ring with life, and the mountains ring, and when I can hear it, there is a ringing that we share.'

This dedication to understanding our place within the weave of nature (rather than above it) is often found in works that portray man's relationship with the natural world through the lens of what we might call *tapas*, discipline. In the strange little story from Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, we encounter a silent shepherd, who dedicates himself to restoring the natural harmony of his valley by planting one hundred acorns a day:

'He was planting oak trees. I asked him if the land was his. He said it wasn't. Did he know who the owner was? No, he didn't. He thought it must be common land, or perhaps it belonged to people who weren't interested in it. He wasn't interested in who they were. And so, with great care, he planted his hundred acorns.'

Some fifty years after Giono's story a woman found her *tapas* by planting not acorns but herself in the land and

in the sea every day. The Outrun by Amy Liptrott is a story of besting addiction through journeying into the self, surrounded by the challenges of life lived on Orkney, hovering in the healing space between water, earth, and air. Liptrott gives the reader an insight into the discipline required to rebuild the self:

'I'm repairing these dykes at the same time as I'm putting myself back together. I am building my defences, and each time I don't take a drink when I feel like it, I am strengthening new pathways in my brain. I have to break the walls down a bit more before I can start to build them up again. I have to work with the stones I've got and can't spend too long worrying if I'm making the perfect wall. I just have to get on with placing stones.'

The *niyama saucha* is often translated simply as purity but we must expand that definition to understand it refers to purity of all personal actions, of the body, the mind, speech, the soul, something that we can all acknowledge must be a lifelong work in progress. In Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we find a man following this narrative in the inverse, Dorian is young and pure of face and thought and then his corruption begins and he descends to the depths of impurity, all of it etched out in gruesome detail on the portrait that holds his soul.

Though Wilde was no ascetic himself he shows the reader the awful irony of Dorian's belief in his freedom being rooted in his lack of resistance to all temptations, physical and spiritual, his dedication to denying himself nothing, being what actually constructs his prison of torment:

'We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.'

I have taught hundreds of classes using hundreds of novels, poems, short stories, and plays, each week I choose a new work and, with my students, embark on an exploration of the self, using the greatest literary minds as our navigators. I am emboldened in my practice by the knowledge that I have barely read the tip of the iceberg, the wisdom to be found in these pages is as limitless as human creativity. These great works of literature provide a path to look inwards, a way for the reader or audience to walk with the narrative to a place of learning and greater comprehension. If we can just listen the words can lead us into a practice of the *niyamas* and so bring us to inner stillness – that place within where we can withdraw from

JESSICA LAWRENCE

Jessica Lawrence qualified as a yoga teacher in October 2015 and taught her first official literary yoga class one week later. As well as using the world's literature to inform her students' yoga experience and increase its accessibility, Jessica has researched the roots of the tradition of yoga and the language underpinning it, taking an academic year of undergraduate Sanskrit at Cambridge University. Jessica is currently studying for her Masters in Classics and believes that, other than books and yoga, wild swimming and ballet can help to find some inner stillness.

INSTANT ENLIGHTENMENT?

From Shamans leading Ayahuasca ceremonies in South America to hash smoking Sadhus in the Himalayas, hallucinogenic drugs have played an important role in sacred and spiritual practices since ancient times. Are drugs simply an escape from reality or an expansion of reality? Can drugs substitute for years of meditation? Is there some common ground between them? In this article I will attempt to show that there is, at least at the cellular level. How this translates to a direct comparison between drugs and meditation at a higher level remains a contentious issue.

Historical Background

Archeologists were very pleased when they used the latest advances in what is called Organic Residue Analysis to show that Cannabis has been around for at least 2500 years. The more powerful hallucinogens like Mescaline and Psilocybin have a long history, and of course everyone's favourite, Ayahuasca, has been used by Amazonian tribes for centuries. In Vedic times, Soma (the king of herbs), a drug still not identified with absolute certainty, was highly praised and played a central role in religious ceremonies. In Patanjali's Yogashastra, the first sūtra of the fourth book called Kaivalya Pāda states that yogic powers (siddhis) arise as the result of supreme concentration (samādhi), practice of austerity (tapas), repetition of mantra, by miraculous birth, and from herbs (ausadhi).

Ausadhi refers to a herb, medicine or drug that

engenders a particular power or ability in the person who has consumed it, and implies that drugs are a legitimate means of attaining spiritual accomplishments.

In more recent times, quoting Aldous Huxley, 'The revival of religion will come about as the result of biochemical discoveries that will make it possible for large numbers of men and women to achieve a radical self transcendence and a deeper understanding of the nature of things. And this revival of religion will be at the same time a revolution'.

A quick look at the brain and receptors

When you exercise, your body releases chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins are among the brain chemicals known as neurotransmitters, which function to transmit electrical signals within the nervous system. Endorphins interact with the opiate receptors in the brain to reduce our perception of pain and act similarly to drugs such as morphine and codeine. The point is that the body produces its own chemicals which interact, or bind, to specific receptors in the brain. But we can also introduce chemicals from outside which bind to the same receptors and produce similar effects. Another neurotransmitter is serotonin, or 5-HT. It is sometimes labelled the happy chemical because it contributes to wellbeing and happiness. It is mainly found in the brain, bowels, and blood platelets. Although serotonin is naturally present in the brain, certain drugs can mimic its effect by binding to



the same serotonin receptors. These drugs include LSD, Psilocybin (mushrooms), DMT (Ayahuasca) and Mescaline (Peyote).

Drugs and Evolution

Evidence suggests that psychedelic drugs have a higher affinity to human serotonin receptors than they do for other primates. Some time in the distant past, when humans separated from our common ancestor with chimpanzees, a positive selection took place which enhanced the biological activity of neuropeptides (a form of neurotransmitter). This not only protected them from enzymatic degradation but also increased their affinity for receptor binding. This was the beginning of an evolutionary history of adaptation which allowed the human body to metabolise plant toxins.

The Effects of Psychedelic Drugs

The word 'psychedelic' literally means 'mind manifesting', and refers to the abilities of such substances as LSD, Mescaline, and Psilocybin to temporarily suspend our normal perceptual and mental functioning while having little effect upon memory. Visual and other sensory effects are common, and higher dosages can lead to a complete dissolution of an individual's awareness of himself as an individual (producing a sense of 'merging'), an inability to distinguish between perceptions arising from inside and outside of the body, and the temporary suspension of normal

cognitive and affective interpretations of perceptions. The feature that distinguishes the psychedelic agents from other classes of drugs is their capacity to induce states of altered perception, thought, and feeling that are rarely experienced except in dreams, naturally occurring mystical experiences, and psychosis.

Many people claim that they have experienced deeply meaningful spiritual awakenings through the use of such drugs. In a much cited trial, volunteers were administered Psilocybin and the effects compared to a control group. Psilocybin produced a range of acute perceptual changes, subjective experiences, and labile moods including anxiety. Psilocybin also increased reports of mystical experiences. Two months after the trial volunteers rated the psilocybin experience as having substantial personal meaning and spiritual significance and attributed to the experience sustained positive changes in attitudes and behaviour. When administered under supportive conditions, Psilocybin occasioned experiences similar to spontaneously occurring mystical experiences, 33 percent of the volunteers rated the Psilocybin experience as being the single most spiritually significant experience of their life' with an additional 38% rating it to be among the top five most spiritually significant experiences. In written comments about their answers, the volunteers often described aspects of the experience related to a sense of unity without content (pure consciousness) and/or unity of all things.

Is there such a thing as a 'core experience'?

A lot of debate centres around the question if mystical experiences are influenced by context, culture, and previous conditioning which 'flavour' the experience, or if there is a core experience which transcends all conditioning. To describe such an experience may require the use of familiar imagery and concepts, and this complicates the issue. One approach seeks to find if there is a common mechanism at the cellular level shared by both meditation and psychedelics.

The Default Mode Network

The Default Mode Network (DMN) is a group of brain regions that seem to show lower levels of activity when we are engaged in a particular task like paying attention, but higher levels of activity when we are awake and not involved in any specific mental exercise. It is during these times that we might be daydreaming, recalling memories, envisioning the future, monitoring the environment, thinking about the intentions of others, and so on. The experience of unity that is central to mystical experiences involves a decrease in self-referential processing. There is compelling evidence that the DMN is involved in self-referential processing and maintenance of a sense of the self in space and time. Decreased activity in these areas has been observed both after administration of classic hallucinogens and during meditation practices.

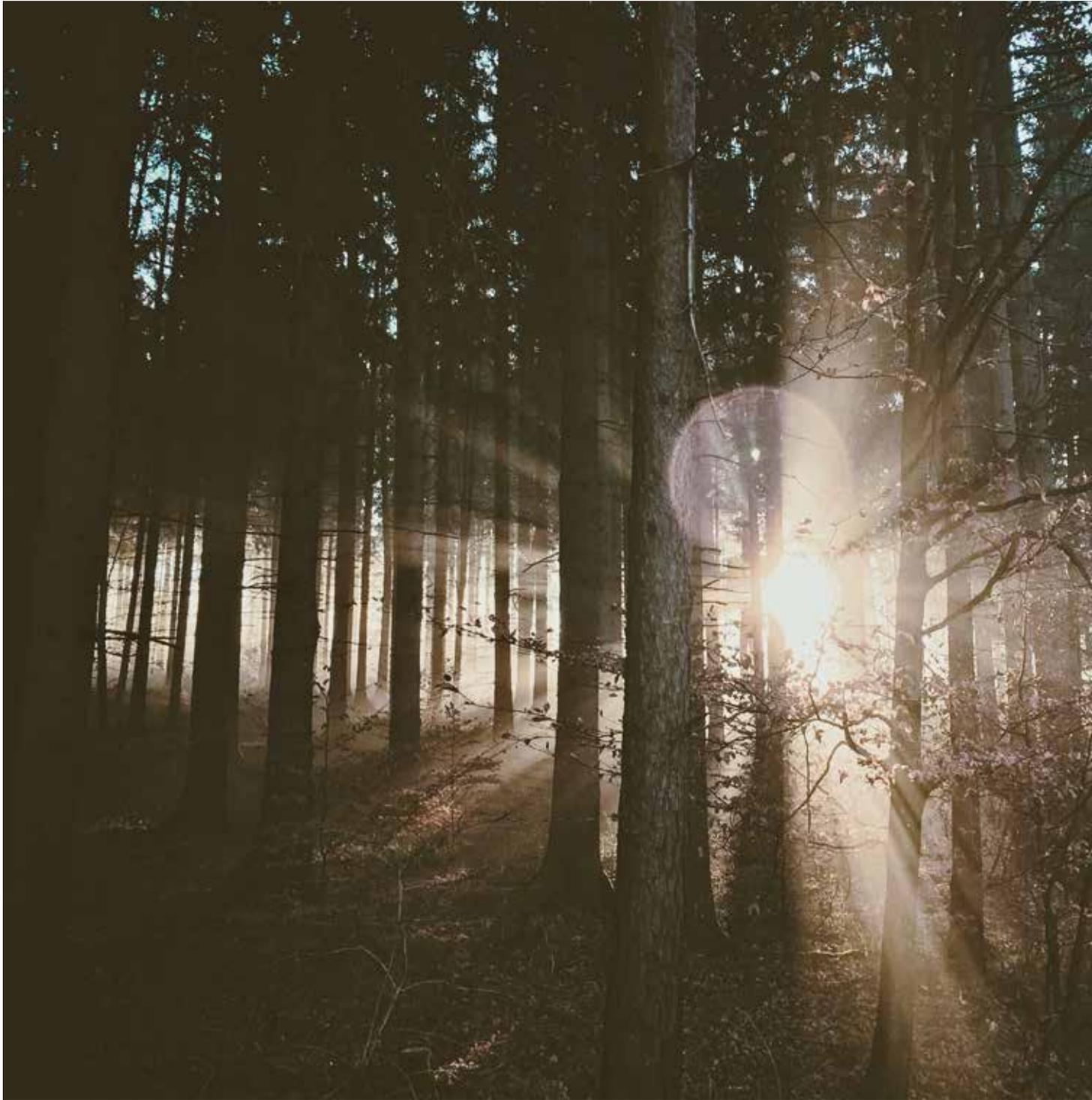
This interrupts the ordinary control mechanisms and allows the emergence of the innate cognitive processes of lower brain systems, including visionary experiences. Research now indicates that serotonin plays a key role in the modulation of the DMN, providing a fascinating link at the cellular level between psychedelic drugs and mystical experiences. Intense concentration, meditation, as well as psychedelic drugs, induce experiences that alter the sense of knowing through an experience of dissolution of the self. The experiences include the sense that knowledge is ineffable, beyond explanation, and a feeling of being tuned in to an all-pervasive consciousness.

BRIAN COOPER PhD

Brian is the editor of Amrita Yoga Magazine









THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

I had been sitting on the floor for what felt like 2 hours without moving. My eyes were shut and I was not permitted to move my legs or my arms - the only movement I could make was to straighten my back and relax my back. Making any movement was painful - but I had a strong determination not to move. This was my fourth day of sitting - 10 hours a day.

I was attuned to what half an hour felt like on the body - the pain starts to settle in on the hips and lower back. By 45 minutes, it becomes physical and mental torture - every minute feels like an hour. My agitated mind was making the physical pain worse. Not for the first time, I question: Why am I here? Why am I voluntarily putting myself through this excruciation?

The Vipassana meditation technique looks at the Art of Living. Accepting that a natural part of life involves suffering, and suffering is the inordinate attachment that each of us has to our minds and our bodies. People cling strongly to their identity and when this is challenged, it can bring about suffering.

The technique delves into the functional architecture underlying the regulation of our emotions. Emotional responses can facilitate rapid action, decision making and create social connections; however, equally, our ability to control the nature of our emotional responses as circumstances change is just as important. For instance, we may attempt to change how we think about an emotionally evoking stimulus or shorten our focus of attention to diminish an undesired emotion. The Vipassana technique teaches a different way to process these emotions.

Sensory information is received through our 5 sensory organs. This generates certain sensations

arising in the physical body - a signal that something is happening. However once a value has been attached to the incoming information, the sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant, depending on the valuation given. If the sensation is pleasant, we seek to prolong or intensify the sensation whereas if the sensation is unpleasant, we will have aversion to it and attempt to push it away. The ability to respond emotionally to important cues in our environment is critical for adaptive human function. For instance, the emotion of fear is key to our survival, but we tend to latch onto these positive or negative feelings far longer than is evolutionary necessary and this is what causes our suffering.

The literal meaning of Vipassana is to 'look', however the metaphorical meaning is 'to watch, or observe' and this is what we are taught during the 10 day course. We are taught to observe, exclusively to the sensations in our body. Watching them as they rise, knowing that eventually all sensations pass, depending on how much attention you feed them. The aim is not to react to them, as our old habits would have. You learn, not from a merely intellectual level that all sensations arise and pass as part of their natural cycle, but from an experiential level through the meditation technique. This theory extends to everything in life. Everything is impermanent. Everything is changing at every moment and by observing the impermanence of our sensations, we learn to allow this natural process to occur without attempting to influence it's natural state or process.

How this looks in reality is that on the course, we sit cross-legged for 10 hours a day. The first 3 days, we focus

on the space below the nostrils and above the upper lip. We focus on the sensations we feel in this small area of the body. At first we notice only gross sensations - an itch, maybe heat, or cold but after 10 hours a day, my mind became focused and I begin to feel subtle sensations. Ah wonderful - some subtle tingling!

These first 3 days are challenging - physically because of the pain throughout the body but also mentally difficult. Having to sit with pain and not run away is arduous. Sitting for 2 hours sessions is boring and trying to control the monkey mind can be tricky. Not to mention the fact that no talking or gesturing to anyone is permitted throughout the 10 days. No books, no journals, no phone, no yoga(!) - no stimuli of any kind is permitted. It is an almost entirely internal process. Just me and my mind...and who knew what dark, disturbing issues from my past I had buried deep in the back of my mind.

After 3 days of focusing entirely on the small space below the nose and above the upper lip, my mind was sufficiently focused to be aware of the sensations elsewhere on my body. We are instructed to start observing the sensations we feel scanning the body from head to toe. This is challenging in many ways. We are taught to look for both subtle and gross sensations. We are encouraged to not move at all during each sitting and this is incredibly difficult. All I could feel was pain, throbbing, heaviness or numbness. But we observe without reacting, without moving, without distraction. Just observing the sensation as if detached from it.

For me, day 7 was when things shifted. My pain



disappeared (mostly) and a pleasant sensation arises. This is a dangerous time when the pain gives rise to pleasure. It is tempting to indulge in this and crave more of the pleasant sensation. By craving, we start to form attachment to a particular sensation. When this sensation is no longer there, it causes disappointment and eventually leads to misery. Again, we are taught to observe with no judgement. Addictions come under this second category of craving. People become addicts, not because of the external object they crave but to the sensation that arises within. When the sensation passes (as is its natural cycle), one gets disappointed and seeks to generate the pleasant sensation again.

The course is set in strict conditions, so there are as few distractions as possible. Invariably personal struggles arise and there is no outlet to deal with them, except to observe the sensations that are created by the perception of these struggles. They call this process 'weeding the garden'. Without external stimulus to probe a reaction, your memory will bring up thoughts which cause a reaction of sensations. Here is the test! Invariably, I failed and gave momentum to issues such as relaying conversations or negative events from my past. However, after several days, you learn that these sensations (good or bad) do pass and because you have not had the opportunity to externalise your reaction, there is no chain reaction that will lead to additional struggles or problematic outcomes for you. You are neither externalising the issue, nor suppressing it - you are observing it and letting it pass. As soon as you show aversion or craving to a particular sensation, you are giving it momentum to duplicate and thus you are attaching yourself to the sensation. This means the natural passing

of it takes much longer. The more energy or momentum you give to an issue you have, the longer you suffer.

In the real world, using this technique is valuable - and necessarily (otherwise one questions what the point of the course was for). When you hear something, taste something, see something or remember something that you do not like, watch your sensations - observe and try not to react. You will likely still react but perhaps it will take you a little longer to react. Each time you do this, you are getting stronger at the technique. Eventually you become more in control of your own mind. Similarly for craving - if you want a piece of cake, then take some cake - enjoy it, take pleasure when eating it, but don't attach yourself to the sensation arising. If you feel like you want more, notice what sensations are arising with you. Watch them and allow them to pass.

The purpose of Vipassana is to change our behavioural habits to relieve ourselves from misery. By following this technique during the 10 day course, I came out the other side, more balanced of my emotions, more self aware and more emotionally intelligent.

It has been almost 2 weeks since I finished the course and I have noticed two things - firstly a massive shift in negative energy that I was carrying before I started the course and secondly, my reaction to situations has improved. I am watching the sensations that arise (both positive and negative) - it is a bit like a game I'm constantly playing with myself and in that respect, it is a game of self enquiry and self compassion. Vipassana has been a real game changer in my life and every course I have done has brought me deeper into understanding myself and the world I live in.

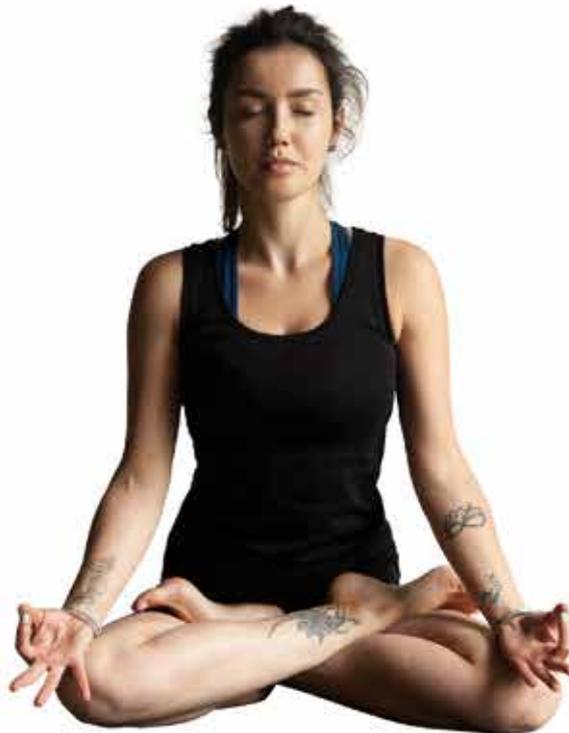
LOUISE WALLACE

Louise is a long term staff member of Yoga Alliance Professionals. She has been teaching yoga for a couple of years. She has completed 3 Vipassana courses in the UK and Sweden and loves them!

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FACING THE MIND

THE FUTURE OF YOGA IN SCHOOLS

They entered broken, terrified, dribbling, shadows of their former selves. They felt dejected, rejected, like outliers. The hospital was the only place that made sense, the place that felt safe and reliable. Sometimes they managed to move, bodies in space, slowly organising themselves on their mats. Sometimes, one or two of them needed to be escorted out of the room for fear of their safety. But mostly, they would manage a shape, a stretch, a slight discipline before the flop, the giving up, the true surrender. Mostly some shift happened – a little smile, a blissful moment of calm. But for Josie, it didn't do it, the thoughts tormented her no matter what. I dug deep, we tried mudras, we tried breathing exercise, we tried stronger postures, we tried self-soothing techniques, music... Until one day we stumbled upon mantras. Her mind cooled, her body relaxed, the mantras gave her focus, discipline, clarity. None of them could sit alone with their terrifying, ghostly, destructive thoughts. Each of them needed something to soothe their minds and find calm even for a minute.

My students at the Callington Road Hospital sectioned unit in Bristol were my greatest teachers for over 3 years, and showed me that yoga can be applied to anyone. It also taught me that for many people, sitting with one's mind is the single most scary thing in the world. It is, in fact, the seat of all suffering.

I find it useful to look at the extreme situation. With the mental health crisis now at the centre of focus for school teachers, as outlined and recognised in the most recent Ofsted guidelines, we need to know how exactly yoga can impact and support optimal mental health and how it cannot. More and more school teachers, social workers

and youth workers come on the TeenYoga course to learn how to apply yoga to support young people as this is not covered in most PGCE (Post graduate certificate of education) courses (I know as I teach on them) – they are not equipped to deal with the 1 in 4 young people who present with anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders or other mental health challenges.

It is ridiculous to think that these students would be comfortable sitting quietly, unguided with their thoughts. It would be cruel. But yoga guides us to calm, through the body and the breath.

As yogis, we know yoga makes a difference. The cortisol experiment that the BBC did with us in 2018 indicates what we already know – that cortisol drops during yoga but even before yoga our cortisol levels are lower. In the Big Yoga Survey researched at Westminster University, 80% said that yoga had been transformative. We also know that my experience of yoga might not be the same as yours. While my transformation occurred during Satsang at the Sivananda centre in Putney, yours might have occurred during an adjustment in an Anusara class. Even though we have different backgrounds, abilities, interests, hobbies and pain points, yoga manages to morph itself into exactly the need of each individual.

Some of its beauty lies in its anarchy. Yoga morphs to suit each culture and tradition and individual. In conversations with yogis across the UK and beyond, and also in classes and courses, there are two prevalent areas of concern that are broached – manualisation of yoga, narrowing the science into a contracted and undignified shadow of itself. The second is the problem of mindfulness.



Through the current demand for regulation and research outcomes, there is often an emphasis put on having a refined manualisation of a yoga class, calling for a definition of each class to be outlined to the last, minute detail.

Initiatives to define yoga narrowly as one particular way, especially in relation to standardisation, and attempts to systematise for the purposes of research, do yoga and practitioners a deep disservice: firstly because a narrow view leaves out the vital diversity of yoga, limits yoga to those who fit that particular box, and secondly, though it might seem to make issues relating to research and quality standards more easy to manage, it actually makes it less likely that we can achieve a evidence base that represents fully the wider range of benefits available through yoga.

The eight limbs of yoga, as explained by Patanjali, work both in parallel and as a diagnostic tool. To manualise yoga is to narrow it down, stifle it and reduce its reach and its social potential. What we need is not manuals and standardisation but experienced and attentive teachers, who use all the instruments of yoga at their disposal to attend judiciously and wisely to the needs of their students.

The other concern is related; the practice of mindfulness has become common in schools, it is being “delivered” to young people in a wide range of contexts. Many yoga teachers are concerned that students become very uncomfortable when asked to sit alone with their uncomfortable thoughts, often in the hands of inexperienced mindfulness practitioners or teachers. Some initial re-

search is showing that a number of students in specific socio-economic contexts are experiencing extreme discomfort with the practice and in some instances, it is doing more harm than good.

When something becomes popular, we are responsible to the public to make sure that our offering is evidence-based and safe. In this case it is important to have clear guidelines and definitions of what we mean when we talk about mindfulness. Also, it is important in the eyes of schools to be accountable to parents and pupils, so that they know what they are offering the pupils. This is why the MBSR (Mindfulness based stress reduction) and the MiSP (Mindfulness in schools) have been defined in the form of a manual, allowing accurate replication and outcomes.

As Jon Kabat Zinn said so clearly, students need to be scanned before undertaking the MBSR programme, a physical practice needs to be part of it and the teachers need to be long term practitioners. Is this happening? How do we ensure quality control as yoga becomes more accepted? How do we ensure that yoga retains its core majestic value while becoming more widely accepted? There are plenty of examples of disciplines that have managed that magical step; osteopathy, psychotherapy and teaching. We need to keep our focus on everything that yoga has to offer, ensure our teachers are very well trained and wise, then trust them to model yoga by remaining open hearted and open minded in its application. It can be done.

CHARLOTTA MARTINUS

Charlotta is the world leading expert on yoga for young people. Her book “Teen Yoga for Yoga Therapists” was published in August 2018 by Hachette and has sold out its first print run with 2000 copies sold. She speaks regularly on the BBC “Thought for The Day” and is actively involved in government policy to bring yoga into schools. Under Charlotta the Teen Yoga Foundation has contributed to a 2 year EU funded project examining the range of benefits of yoga for young people. Charlotta is a pioneer in yoga for teenagers, and has worked as a school teacher and yoga therapist for mental health while being a single mother of two young men.

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PSYCHEDELICS AND THE SPIRITUAL PATH CRITICAL VOICES AND CONSIDERATIONS

'I undertake the training to abstain from intoxicants which cloud the mind' (the Fifth Precept of Buddhism)

This paper was originally presented as a presentation at of the British Psychological Society's Transpersonal Psychology 19th annual conference – 'Psychedelics, Psychology and Spirituality'.

It was my intention, in the best spirit of academic debate and inquiry, to offer some critical perspectives and considerations related to the use of psychedelics in relation to the origins and development of Transpersonal Psychology.

To this end I reflected on the work and lives of some influential counter culture figures including Albert Hofmann, Abraham Maslow, Ram Dass and others – each of whom raised particular concerns and doubts in relation to the potential risks associated with psychedelics, which I will argue still resonate today.

The purpose of this article is to provide a summary of some of the critical perspectives concerning the use of psychedelic substances, specifically to achieve spiritual states or awakenings, that were voiced during the birth of Transpersonal Psychology during the 1960s and 1970s by prominent and influential voices, both in Transpersonal and Counter Culture circles. I also hope to include some insights and perspective from different wisdom traditions to further deepen, extend and inform the discussion.

Buddhism in particular may be noted for its Fifth Precept. For the Buddhist (particularly the traditional Theravadin schools) we are already contending with the three poisons of ignorance, craving and hatred, collectively sleepwalking through this Samsaric, illusory realm; the use of psychedelics may then be understood to only exacerbate our predicament and confusion; further disturbing our minds and distorting our perceptions.

The Father of LSD and his 'Problem Child'

Albert Hofmann (1906-2008) is celebrated by many as the man who discovered LSD while working at Sandoz laboratories in Switzerland. His ingestion of the substance, in 1943, led to his now famous psychedelic bike ride home – now commemorated by admirers every April 19th as 'Bicycle Day'. Few pharmacists have ever achieved the status of counter culture icon and Guru.

In a correspondence dated 1961 to his friend and fellow Psychonaut Ernst Jünger, Hofmann reflects:

'On the one hand, I would have the great desire, besides the natural- scientific, chemical-pharmacological investigation of hallucinogenic substances, also to research their use as magic drugs in other regions.... On the other hand, I must admit that the fundamental question very much occupies me, whether the use of these types of drugs, namely of substances that so deeply affect our minds, could not indeed represent a forbidden transgression of limits.'

The choice of the word 'transgression' is particularly interesting as it has religious and moral connotations. One might consider the not uncommon report of people under the influence of LSD reporting that they 'see God', or later, similar slogans graffitied onto walls or printed on T-shirts reading 'Eat Acid – See God'. In his concluding assessment, the real value of LSD lies in its role as a 'medicine for the soul', its capacity to bring about spiritual insights and the possibility of it being allied with existing spiritual methods: 'I see the true importance of LSD in the possibility of providing material aid to meditation aimed at the mystical experience of a deeper, comprehensive reality. Such a use accords entirely with the essence and working character of LSD as a sacred drug'.

It is important to reflect on the way 'drug' has become a loaded, pejorative term initiating associated discourses of



addition, 'getting high', or even the memorable campaigns of the 1980's and 1990s 'Just Say No' (to drugs). In this manner the very term 'drug/s,' immediately primes us, negatively inclines and biases us against the subject matter.

Hofmann's vision would seem better suited to the use of terms such as Psychedelic – whose etymological roots suggest making the soul manifest, or, better still, Entheogen/Entheogenic – meaning to generate an experience of the Divine/Spiritual. But this in itself raises a central question – can or should authentic spiritual experiences, or Divine encounters be the result of, or reduced ultimately to pharmacology and brain chemistry?

Counter Culture and Psychedelics

One of the foremost commentators on, and originator of the term 'Counter Culture' was Theodore Roszak (1995). He states:

It took the great psychedelic crusade to perfect the absurdity by proclaiming that personal salvation and the social revolution can be packed in a capsule.'

LSD as a 'Cheap Grace'

Rozzak's concerns appear to have been shared by one of the founding figures of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, Abraham Maslow.

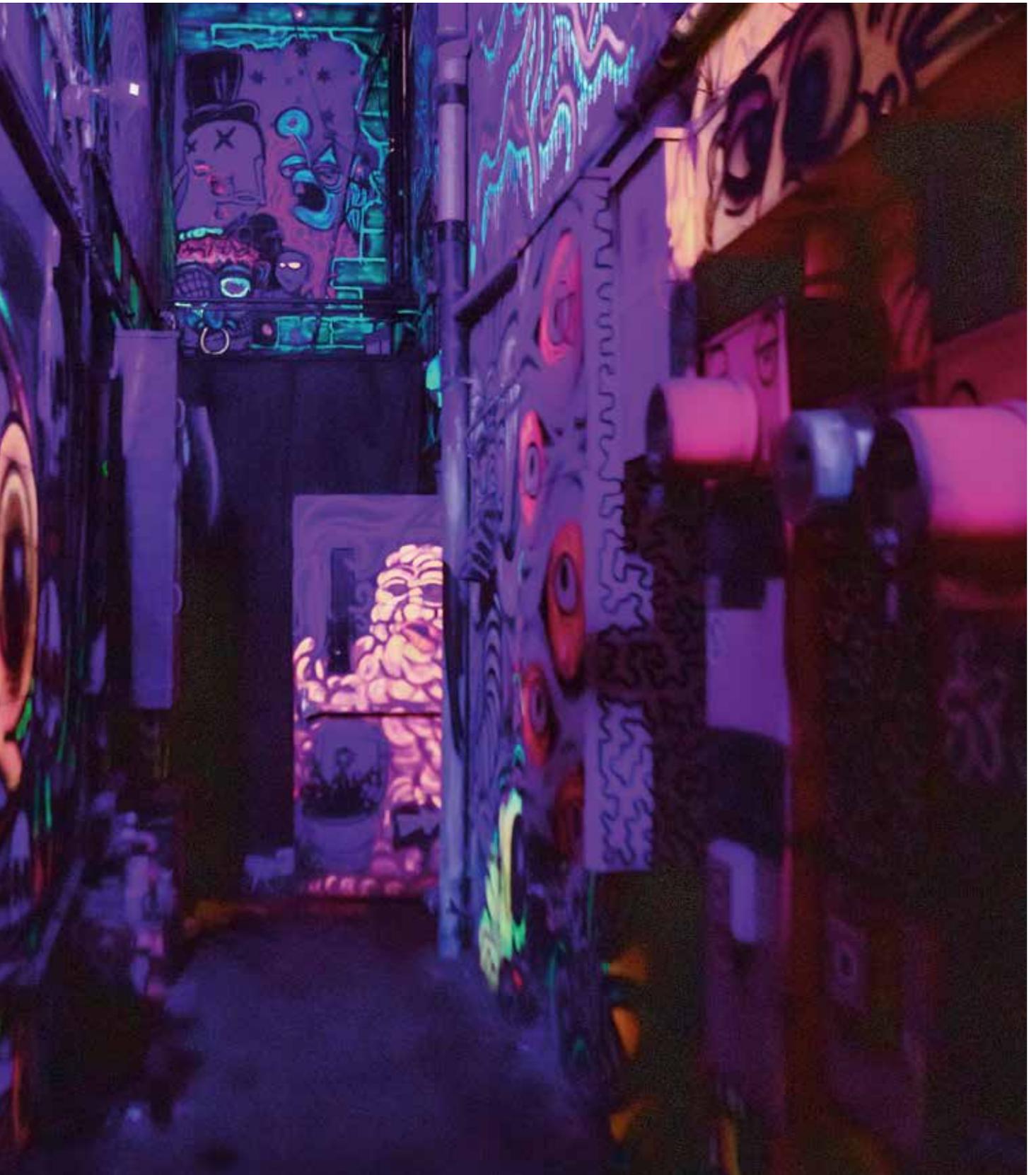
Maslow was initially intrigued and open to the possible links and overlaps between psychedelic experiences and peak experiences; and it's clear from his writings that he was aware of and followed the research. Maslow writes: Any reader of Zen, Taoistic, or mystical literatures knows what I'm talking about. Every mystic has tried to describe this vividness and particularity of the concrete object and, at the same time, its eternal, sacred, symbolic quality. And now, in addition, we have many such descriptions from the experimenters (Huxley, for instance) with the psychedelic drugs.

Maslow firmly shared Hofmann's view that LSD needed to be used in a safe, controlled setting and not abused with reckless abandon. In an unpublished paper titled simply 'Drugs-Critique' Maslow stressed the need for one to work for one's personal/psychological/spiritual growth, that ultimately there weren't shortcuts to self-actualisation.

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about what he calls 'cheap grace'.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace





// THE GADGET-HAPPY AMERICAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FIGURE OF FUN BECAUSE OF HIS FACILE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE EXISTS A TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTION TO EVERY HUMAN PROBLEM //

without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.

For Bonhoeffer the true, authentic spiritual life and path is one that requires both self-discipline, commitment to one's path and involved no small amount of struggle – Bonhoeffer himself was to exemplify this faith and struggle as he preached against fascism at the height of Nazi power, and was subsequently murdered by the SS in 1945.

One common theme throughout the lives of the prophets and saints is their consistent efforts and struggles, trials and tribulations, to reach their eventual salvation – by contrast the idea or claim that one can attain similar transcendent states through simply ingesting a psychedelic substance may appear to mock or belittle the efforts of previous religious seekers.

Jung's Psychedelic Complex?

Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), noted in his 1961 correspondence to Carl Jung, the central role the analyst's writings and works had played in his own recovery from alcoholism, the founding of AA, and the subsequent development of the 12 step programme. It was primarily Jung's emphasis on the addicts need for a spiritual experience that has led to AA's continued emphasis on the need to recognise and accept a 'Higher Power', before

one can effectively embark on the road to recovery and sobriety. However, Jung did not share Wilson's enthusiasm for the use of psychedelics as a therapeutic tool.

Some may be surprised by Jung's apparent 'resistance' with regards to Psychedelics, but it appears entirely in-keeping with his mistrust of spiritual imposters and substitutes and also with his own practice of a more 'inner' alchemy via active imagination and dreamwork.

It is also important to remember that Jung's passion for alchemy stemmed from his initial encounter with one particular Daoist tradition of Inner Alchemy (Neidan). Throughout Daoist history and practice, particularly in regards to the quest for longevity and transcendence, one can observe see a clear shift from earlier external forms (Waidan) to internal forms (Neidan) of alchemical practice.

External forms of alchemy included the use of various substances (some of which may have possessed entheogenic qualities, leading to particular visionary experiences), typically minerals and metals (some of these being toxic – in particular cinnabar/mercury and lead) in order to prepare potent elixirs that could transport one physically or spiritually to the realm of the immortals. External alchemy was a very risky endeavour and a great many Daoist devotees died in their quest to achieve immortality.

By contrast, later traditions of Daoist inner alchemy pursued a path of visualising, summoning and encountering various deities within the body, and working with one's breath and vital energies, through a combination of yogic and meditative methods. The ultimate goal of inner alchemy was to give psychological/spiritual birth to a new authentic/immortal Self. But the path of inner alchemy, as with the path of individuation, could not be hurried, it required patience, time and commitment to authentic cultivation.

In Hindu thought and practice one may encounter a range of different opinions with regards to psychedelic substances. On the one hand anyone travelling through India is likely to meet Sadhus (Holy Men) who ingest Bhang or smoke Ganga (cannabis) as a sacred sacrament and aid to meditation. One may also reflect on the scriptural references to the mysterious, entheogenic substance Soma (Williams 2003), whose properties and praises are enumerated in the Vedas. Yet we should also recognise Hindu schools of thought (particularly within the Ayurvedic healing traditions) that may consider psychedelic substances to be Tamasic and counter-productive to one's spiritual development – Tamasic has its roots in the Sanskrit term Tamas connoting a polluting and dulling

effect that would not be conducive to either physical or spiritual health.

Concluding Reflections

The common theme and concern raised throughout all the above accounts appears to be the pseudo-spiritual quality of psychedelics, partly arising from the perception that they allow the user access to spiritual states without any of the usual spiritual observances, or preliminary practices typically required within the world's wisdom traditions.

At the heart of this debate rests the question of authenticity, and the assumption (on the part of some religious traditions and transpersonal psychologists) that the psychedelic experience is more of a simulation of transcendence or spiritual simulacrum; perhaps hearkening back to the idea of a 'cheap grace'.

Due to the current political climate and criminalisation of psychedelic substances, coupled with some seemingly entrenched positions that would devalue all psychedelic experiences on account of being artificially induced as opposed to naturally achieved, it may be some time before we are able to explore the relationship between spirituality and psychedelics in an open, even-minded and constructive manner.

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STRESS MATTERS

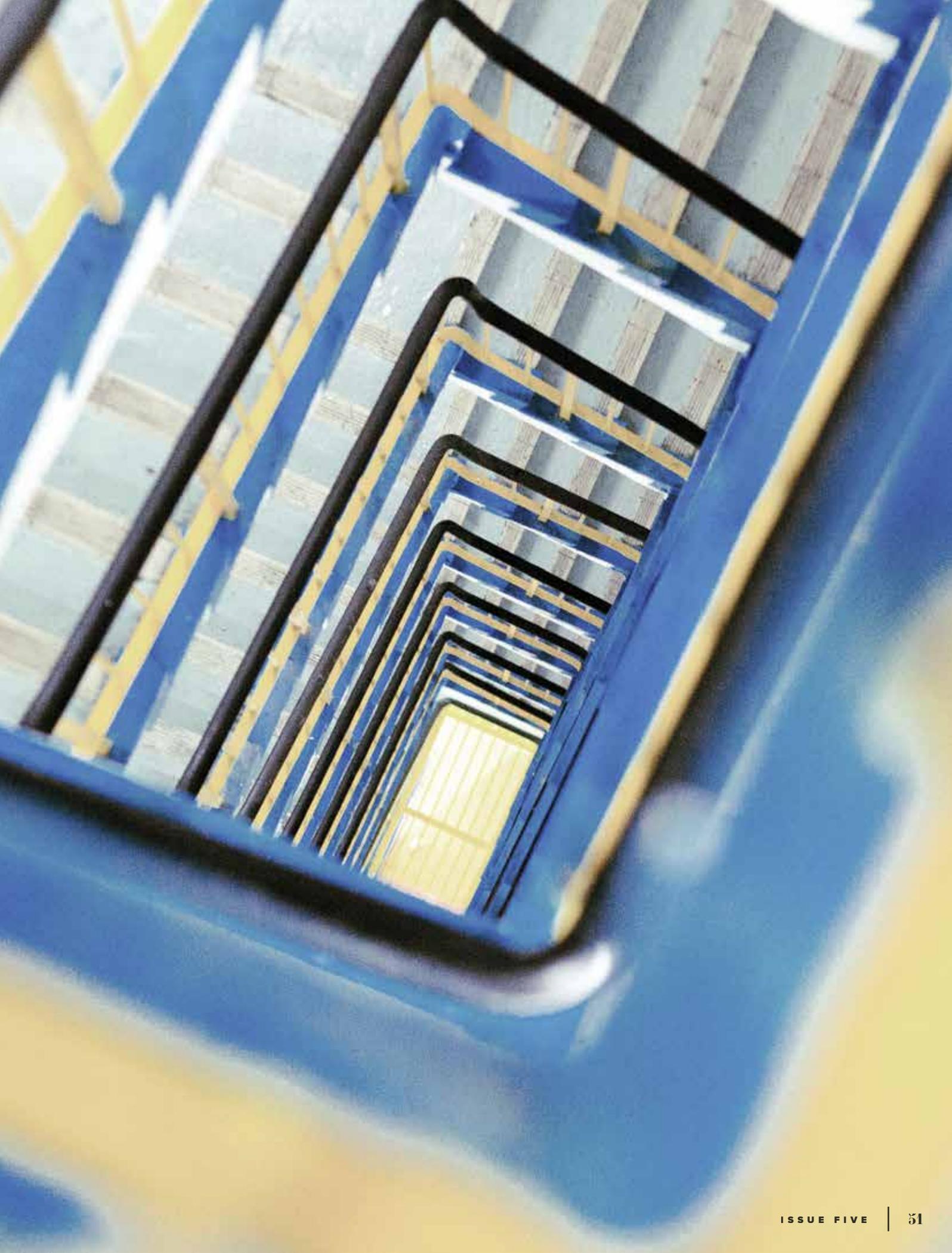


If you live in a city, read on. If you have a job, read on. If you're a parent, give this your undivided attention. I'm the director of an office yoga and wellbeing company which is making the corporate world of London healthier and happier - and my business is thriving, because, sadly, managing stress and preventing burnout remains the biggest challenge employers face today. Stress pervades your work as well as your private life; it affects your sleep patterns and your relationships. We might feel like life is meant to be stressful and we're unsure how it feels to be carefree. Some of us might even be tempted to seek out this notion of being stressed and portray it to the world, maybe partly due to a misguided societal belief that the more stressed we are, the more important we surely appear. But I feel that freedom from stress and anxiety is non-negotiable and that being stressed is not something to strive for, no matter what - because it breaks your body and it breaks your mind. So let's explore what stress actually is, why it shouldn't be an everyday occurrence and what we can do to work against it.

Stress is our body's way of responding to a threat - real or imagined - and whatever the actual or perceived danger, the sympathetic part of our autonomic nervous system reacts. The first and oldest stress response is visceral: if a stressful situation has ever made you feel faint or has immobilised you, that was your visceral stress response.

Because of evolutionary changes, this happens less often nowadays, because this is overridden by our adrenal response, our "fight or flight" mode. Here, our body releases stress hormones: first, adrenalin - a fast-acting chemical that immediately spikes the heart-rate and blood pressure; and second, cortisol - a longer-acting chemical which for the first 30 minutes has a positive effect on you: it heightens your concentration, boosts your immune system and reduces pain sensitivity.

Long-term (over an hour) or when repeated, i.e. when we keep being exposed to stressors, this hormone has serious side effects on our body, causing low blood-sugar and high blood pressure, decreasing your bone and muscle density, and inhibiting your immune system. What goes up must come down, right? Stress also causes the muscles in the body to contract, because tight muscles make the body more resilient to attack. That's a good thing in certain situations, and rare bouts of stress let your body recover relatively quickly, but frequent stress can cause the body to remain in a state of "emergency readiness" or even become hyper-stimulated by these stress hormones, letting muscles remain contracted, which can lead to muscle pain and headaches. Psychological stress can deteriorate your body's ability to regulate pain, which then compounds to more painful muscle tension. Emotionally, when we're stressed, the less evolved parts of our brain responding with fear or anxiety (e.g. the amygdala) become active, which in turn means that our brain's 'executive organ' i.e. the one responsible for rational decision-making (e.g. the prefrontal cortex) is hindered in its work.



Good stress vs. permanent underlying stress

Our stress response is supposed to help us, after all it is there to protect us from a threat. And once the threat is gone, our parasympathetic nervous system kicks in to make us calm again: it metabolises your cortisol and sends signals to the brain to stop producing more stress hormones and instead to start producing a calm chemistry in our body through oxytocin, endorphins and serotonin; your heartbeat and breathing slows down and your muscles relax. Job done! Easy. Or at least it used to be...

Evolution and lifestyles have changed our bodies. Today, our daily stressors are more complex and ongoing: multiple deadlines, 24-hour news, social media, traffic, noise, people... Then there are inner stressors such as our deep seated fears and lifelong expectations rooted in our social conditioning. The difference between these stressors isn't hard to spot: one sudden burst of a stress is a tangible thing which our body can work against, whereas many different stress factors, which are permanently looming, keep our stress levels high. In fact, significant stress exposure, especially in infancy, can alter your body's stress response system as well as the architecture of your brain through an overproduction of neural connections in brain regions dedicated to anxiety and stress. Because of these external, internal and subconscious stressors, we have acquired a permanent state of stress, which is hardest to counter, firstly, because it's underlying (are we even aware of our deep-seated fears or how much our daily commute affects our nervous system?) and secondly, because we are unable to solve these stress factors or make them go away. And if you think that it's not so bad and you're quite safe, living in a democracy, leading a reasonably secure life and not many "real" threats to deal with, let's take a moment to remind ourselves that whatever terrible scenarios we are spinning in our overthinking minds, are as real to our body as if these actually happened! For our body, imagined and real danger mean the same physical process: the chemicals released are exactly the same.

This is why we need to take imagined dangers just as seriously as external ones and to try and understand our internal stressors - the thoughts we've suppressed and which are working on a subliminal level. And then there's another thing aggravating our system even more. We're overworked and overtired, and when our head finally hits the pillow, we often find we can't shut off our brain. Our overactive mind and our constant stress levels often lead to chronic partial sleep deprivation which compounds to our body's imbalanced chemistry, increasing the levels of



stress hormones (which go down during deep sleep), our appetite (through the alteration of hormones stimulating the thyroid) and deteriorating our breathing pattern, thereby decreasing our oxygen intake. This in turn further promotes the production of stress hormones and inhibits the activation of your parasympathetic nervous system.

So we find ourselves in a nice little vicious cycle of stress. But rather than beating ourselves up over being permanently stressed and how we react to this with anger, rather than letting the destructive long-term effects of the previously beneficial stress hormones break us, we can do something against them. We don't have to keep feeling fatigued, headachy, cranky, unable to concentrate and memorise things, we can fight being anxious and irritable, fight the need to control everything around us or become apathetic.



The simple solution: just breathe

Stress is a physical experience, so it makes sense to find a physical way out of it, right? The fact is we can't simply counter stress by thinking positive thoughts. Instead, we need to be in our body, we need to be the ones to reactivate our parasympathetic nervous system, because it's overworked and cannot do the job by itself anymore.

The good news is we can do this very simply by deep diaphragmatic breathing. Extended deep exhalation will activate our vagus nerve, the longest cranial nerve in our body, which connects our knees, stomach, lungs, heart and throat to our brain. This nerve signals the brain that there's no danger, that we're safe and it's time to produce positive neurotransmitters and "happy hormones" oxytocin, endorphins and serotonin.

Have you noticed that most of us breathe in for longer than we breathe out? Do we ever really breathe out all the way? Deep breaths in themselves are great, but it's the longer exhalation in relation to the inhalation that we need in order to destress faster. And if on top of that we use our vocal chords (larynx), this is even more effective, so try humming a melody to yourself, or use Bhramari Pranayama (the "humming bee" yoga exercise). While yoga postures will relax your stressed muscles, what we do in Pranayama, the part of yoga focussing on voluntary respiration, is to calm our nervous system by lowering our heart rate, blood pressure and sugar levels and improving our blood circulation. In addition to the physiological and psychological benefits, research has also shown that yoga affects the cerebral activities of the body, e.g. memory, concentration and creativity.

The great thing about these breathing techniques is that they work directly on the level of the soma, so not your cognitive mind. Cognitive meditations - the ones where you imagine yourself at a beach, for example - can often be stressful, because you're asked to take your mind on a very specific journey, and if your mind starts wandering, you can easily stress about not doing it right. Working on the body, you don't need your mind to be in a happy place, it doesn't matter what your mind does: we are using our body to relax, instead of being in our head all the time. So make time to practice every day! I know sometimes it's difficult to get even one minute to yourself, but try and start with just that: a minute.

Putting it in perspective

Yoga and mindfulness won't suddenly solve all our problems and we'll never be able to erase all stress from

our lives. Since the world is not designed solely for our benefit, there will always be challenging situations. But we don't need to amplify our stress by focusing too much on ourselves. We can choose to take a step back and change our attitude to this situation - which is essentially the only thing we're actually in control of: not what's going on around us but our reaction to it. And if we do not manage, let's not keep revisiting a situation in which we wish we'd reacted differently. That's not healthy. Life is not just about being in the present moment and reacting in a reflective

way when faced with a challenging situation; it is just as much about learning to forgive ourselves for situations in which we didn't treat the people around us (or ourselves!) with understanding and kindness. So-called "negative" emotions are just as much part of life as "positive" ones, indeed there is no such thing as negative and positive: the emotions we're experiencing - no matter whether we enjoy them or not - need space and need to be treated with kindness. And once we internalise that, we'll be perfectly equipped to deal with all the challenges life has to offer.

BASSANTI PATHAK

Bassanti Pathak, a keen yogini since her Indian father taught her at age eight, is cofounder and director of Pathak Yoga, a London-based health and wellbeing services provider for the corporate world, specialising in yoga and mindfulness to reduce work-related stress. She has a diploma in Yoga and Naturopathy from Delhi's International Foundation for Natural Health and Yoga, a Masters from Bonn University and studied at Harvard and Clark University, focussing on social psychology. A former Fulbright scholar, banker, film producer and screenwriter, she knows the different physical and mental challenges academia and fast-paced, volatile industries can pose. After nannying her niece and nephew, she created a TV-series for CBeebies, empowering nursery-aged children to overcome frustrations through movement and breath.

Instagram: @pathakyoga

Facebook: facebook.com/pathakyoga

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YOUR MIND IS NOT THE ENEMY

Like so many people, I came to Yoga to find some relief from my stress. I was 18 years old, had just moved away to university and was not a social adept. My mother urged me to give yoga a go and I did. The first thing I noticed was that I liked it, the second was that I didn't know why. My friends told me later that whenever I returned back to our digs I was apparently annoyingly happy and unusually friendly. Something was working on more than just my hamstrings, but what?

That was where my curiosity in yoga and its effect on my mood began. Now, nearly 30 years later I have a far better idea of what was, and still is, going on inside my head. My quest began with the mind. What effect was this yoga thing having on my mind and how? Sadly, my 18-year old self decided that my mind was obviously the enemy and was something to be battled against, defeated and ultimately put down. I feel pretty certain that I came to this conclusion due to the repeated words of my first yoga teacher telling us all to 'clear the mind'. We were asked to 'clear the mind' as we began each class and then again as we rested at the end of the class. Try as I might, my mind would not clear. My mind was therefore, in my mind, uniquely flawed and clearly troublesome. I must find a way to destroy it, I thought, in order to clear it. I felt that I needed to cultivate a will of steel and an unmovable determination to cull the mind, to use brute force in order to make it become subservient. How wrong that turned out to be.

In time, I started to ponder whether I could have a different relationship with my mind. Could perhaps my mind be recruited rather than abandoned in my search for clarity? Whatever that meant These questions mulled and buzzed around my head for decades, during my time on and off the matt. Over happy years and through bleak black years I toyed with, fought for and swung pro and against the idea of my mind being 'clear'. Even during my yoga teacher training

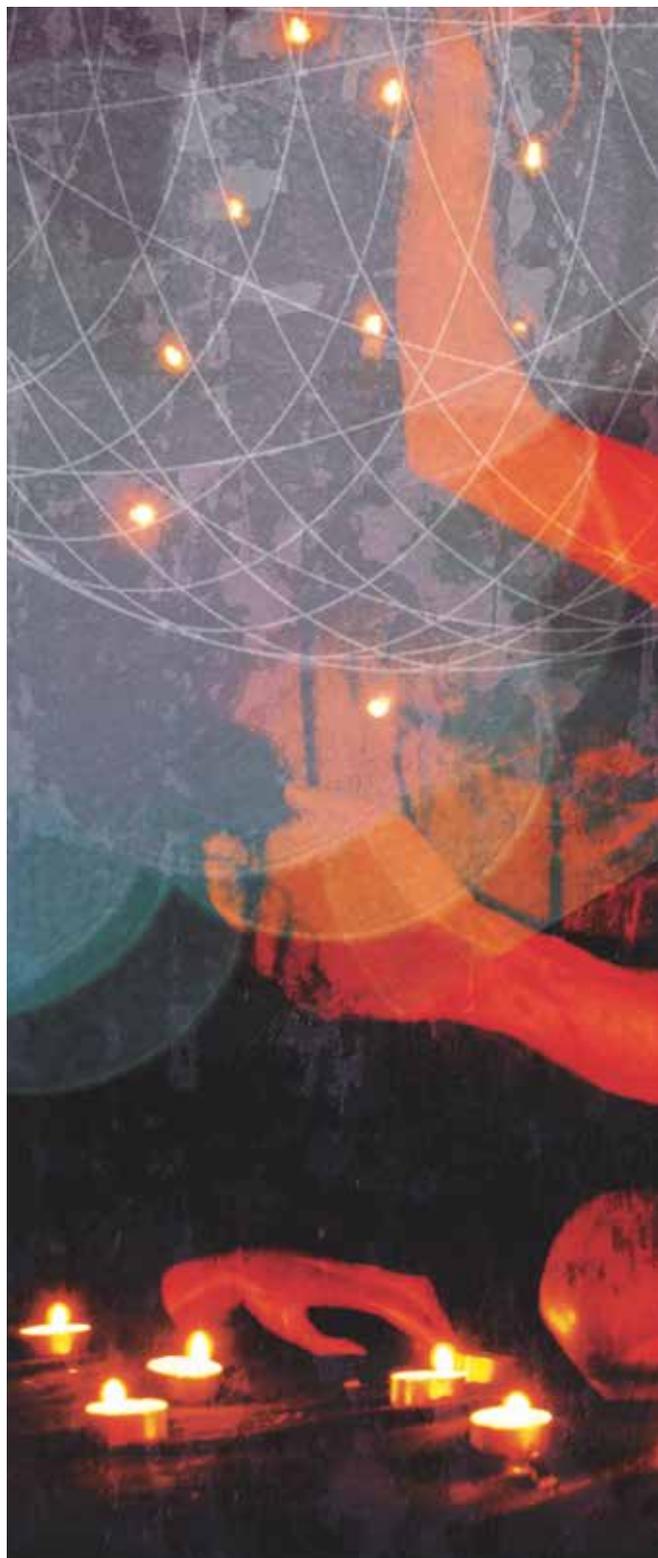
I was still looking for this chalice of calm. The thoughtless, mindless me. Surely this was the thing of the Sages. The levitating, enlightened souls we hear of in our mythologies and histories of yoga, the Mind Masters. This is what yoga teachers are going on about I thought, when they, almost absentmindedly, ask their students to 'now just clear your mind'.

It was 6 or so years ago that I met Alexander Filmer-Lorch and through working with him, the pieces finally started to slot into place. I began, through his expert guidance and deep understanding of philosophy, meditation and psychology, to realise that my mind was actually my friend. In fact, I now like to think of my mind as a small, brilliant child. A child that needs taking very good care of to flourish. In order to gain the trust of my mind I needed to give it respect, attention, love and patience. Otherwise it was going to throw a tantrum and I might end up falling victim to one of its nastier games of anxiety, cruelty or even depression.

So, I gave my mind time. I learnt to understand the way it worked, anatomically, scientifically, psychologically and philosophically. I started to think of my mind as a tool, a tool that needed to be kept sharp and on display so that it didn't sneak off and cause chaos. I began to teach my mind, to train it through very specific, and also surprisingly simple, methods to steady. Methods taught to me by Alexander as part of a very long lineage of universal teachings of meditation. I began to realise how I could use the very thing that I had been fighting against to help me reach my goal of stilling my thoughts and finding the clarity that had eluded me for so many years.

Philosophically speaking, and more recently scientifically speaking, we have 3 brains. A head (or intellect brain), a heart (or emotional brain) and a movement (or instinctual brain). In the language of universal laws when these 3 brains are working in harmony, a new creative and transformational brain appears. One able to navigate all 3 and correctly file information into the right one to maintain the status quo. Let's say we need to get onto a bike and ride to the shops to buy milk. If we try to put this to the emotional brain we have no idea where we could end up. If we try to do this through intellect alone it will take ages to accurately compute all the information required to complete the task. And so we need movement, instinctual brain to jump on the bike and be home before we even know it!

So to find 'clarity of mind', (as well as body and heart for





Picture credit: Anger, Model: Marta Serrano. Photographer: Robert Duff

that matter) we need to work with all 3 brains to find our path towards a steadiness, or stillness of all 3. How many times have we sat down for meditation or 'to clear the mind' only to find our ankles or back hurt. This is a movement brain thing and needs attending to first. To ignore the body requires determination and that is the kind of hard work which will end up simply getting an exhausted mind, which is an entirely different thing all together. Once our movement brain, or body has been placated we might become aware that we're upset about something. Perhaps the quarrel this morning over who would take the last parking space in the street. This is a heart brain thing and needs attending to in the same way, giving it a moment of attention and noticing the feelings. And then, we remember that we've forgotten to send that email to the boss. This is a head brain thing and needs to be noted so it doesn't start to create a mind loop, popping back into the mind again and again and delaying the process of stilling.

Only once all 3 brains have been given their time and attention will they soften, a little like putting wax on a camera lense, blurring our focused attentive mind and opening our expansive, awareness mind. The 3 brains can now become passive and quietly open to allowing something new to occur. Some days this new thing might actually just happen to be a clear mind. No thoughts, just presence. Some days your mind will present you with something else. It just is as it is, whilst practice allows for more clear days than cluttered

ones. Which is the reward for discipline and patience.

Finally, it is important to remember that the brain actually waves. Our brain waves at different speeds or frequencies throughout the day depending on what we're up to. From busy Beta waves towards relaxed Alpha waves into chilled, almost meditative Theta waves before dropping into dream state Delta waves. These waves MOVE. They exist and they can't just be cleared like a work surface. Interestingly while a busy Beta slows towards Alpha, into Theta and then into super sleepy Delta, a truly meditative mind, as proved through research with Buddhist monks, displays the fastest of all waves, the ultimate transformative Gamma wave of the mind. A truly meditative mind is as fast as lightening and as sharp as a knife. It's focused and expansive at the same time and through this expansive nature it is no longer cluttered or cramped as there is just so much space inside it. You could even call it clear, perhaps?

Whatever your mind goal I would urge you to consider cultivating a love affair with your mind, not trying to keep up a battle with it because, trust me, you will lose. And if you do want to learn more about how to truly calm your mind then do look up Alexander Filmer-Lorch or get in touch with me at Flow Tunbridge Wells where we have just launched our new 330 hour Understanding Yoga Teacher Training course which is registered and approved by Yoga Alliance Professionals with very special guest teachers including Alexander.

LUCY PARKER, SENIOR YOGA TEACHER

Having taught for 10 years, with over 4,000 hours of teaching experience, Lucy is a registered Senior Yoga Teacher with Yoga Alliance Professionals. Lucy co-teaches her own yoga teacher training, a 330 hour course running every 2 years called Understanding Yoga. Lucy is a Contact Teacher for the London-based Yoga Campus Teacher Training course. She teaches weekly group classes at Flow Tunbridge Wells in Yoga and Meditation as well as private 1-2-1s, offering clients a tailored and bespoke self-discovery and learning experience.

Visit Flow Tunbridge Wells' website
www.flowtunbridgewells.com

Find more from Alexander Filmer-Lorch
<http://alexanderfilmerlorch.co.uk>

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HEADSTAND ON THE FINGERS

YOGIS ON THEIR HEADS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

The Jain Yogāsana

The illustrated Yogāsana is a unique nineteenth century Jain manual that contains watercolour paintings of 108 āsanās, some of which have names peculiar to the Jain tradition, such as kāyotsargāsana ('the posture of casting off the body'). The manuscript has been discussed in an article published in Kaivalyadhama's Yoga Mīmāṃsā Journal (Satapathy Bandita & Sahay Gyan, 2014), as well as an earlier post of The Luminescent (Birch & Hargreaves, 2016).

Among the peculiarities of the Jain Yogāsana manual are several illustrations of inverted positions which depict the yogin with the top of his head placed directly on the fingers (rather than on the ground).

Some early accounts of headstand mention the position of the arms and stipulate that the head as well as the elbows and/or hands are placed on the ground. This is the case for what might be the earliest available description of headstand, called 'the posture from hell', Narakāsana, which resembles the standard headstand of modern postural yoga in so far as the forearms are on the ground, as well as the head:

'Having put his head and elbows of the arms on the ground, [the yogin] should lift the legs into the air like a stick. This is taught as Narakāsana.'

Since consulting several modern publications, I am now more certain that the artist of the Jain Yogāsana

depicted accurately a version of headstand on the fingers (called Vrksāsana) that was practised in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In other words, the depiction of the yogin with the top of his head placed directly on the fingers, rather than on the ground, is not an artistic anomaly, but rather a true and accurate representation of the posture.

The reasons for having the fingers under the head are not stated in any text. The position of the fingers may have inspired the name 'tree posture' (Vrksāsana) because the fingers on the ground resemble tree roots. However, placing the head on the fingers (instead of directly on the ground) requires one to hold the weight of the body with the hands and arms. This makes the balance more challenging, puts pressure on the fingers and requires more muscular effort, particularly in the arms and shoulders, to hold the position.

The textual and visual evidence presented here suggests that there were two basic variations of headstand in the pre-modern period: one placed the top of the head on the ground, and the other kept the head off the ground by placing it on the fingers. When categorised as an āsana, the latter variation is named Vrksāsana, which has several variations depending on the position of the legs. Although Vrksāsana appears in a few early-20th century publications, it is surprising that this variation has not survived, to my knowledge, in contemporary postural yoga.

JASON BIRCH

Birch, Jason. 2019. "Headstand on the Fingers: Yogis on their Heads in the Early Modern Period." *The Luminescent*, 12 February, 2019. Retrieved from: www.theluminescent.org. Copyright with the Author.

योगासनम्

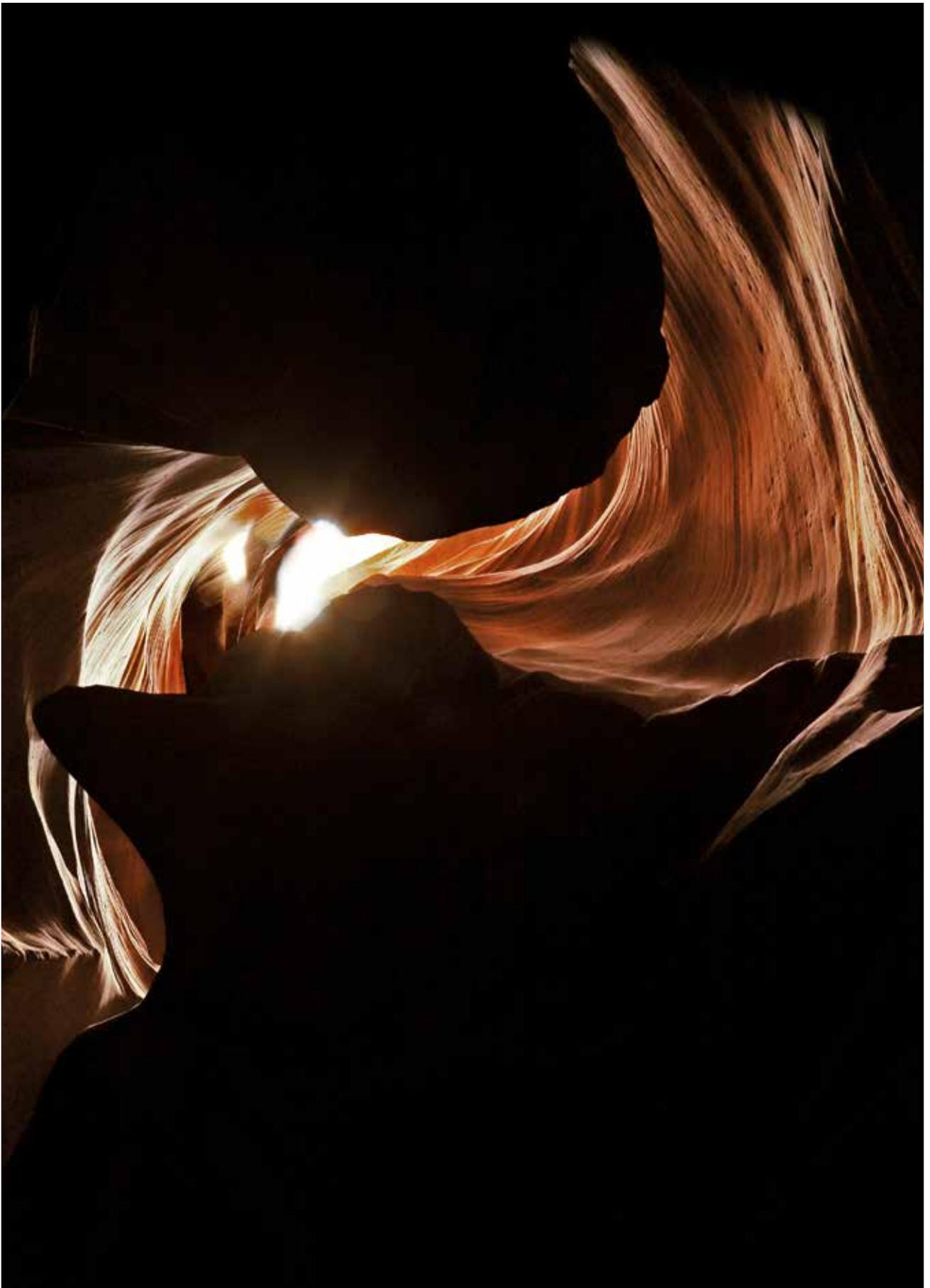


बुद्धासनम् ॥७७॥

योगासनम्



उर्ध्वसंयुक्तपादासनम् ॥७८॥



WARRIOR ONE AND PRONATION DISTORTION SYNDROME

Warrior one is one of those poses that beginners can have a good stab at, but is quite difficult to perfect. Releasing the glutes and external rotators on the posterior hip of the back leg, and engaging the medial line to create internal rotation and square the hips forward, can be difficult for many and can create compression in the SI joint, due to restriction in the psoas and piriformis.

Why is this? Personally I don't put it all down to tight psoas, weak adductors and tight external rotators; it comes back down to foot position of the back leg. Traditionally, we are told to diagonal the back foot to an angle of between 45o - 60o. 45o creates an easier balance but is more difficult to square the hip. 60o can be a little easier on the back, but the balance may not feel as stable.

Many teachers cue the back foot to 45o and then adjust their student's hips to square forward. However this alignment creates an incongruity between the direction of the foot and the knee, which in my opinion is not healthy neuro-muscularly.

The compensation pattern called Pronation Distortion Syndrome involves the foot pointing out laterally, while the knee squints medially, creating internal rotation through the leg and hip. This pattern creates a valgus knee which in turn pronates the inner arch of the foot. The similarities between this compensation pattern and the universal cues we use for Warrior 1 are obvious.

The lateral positioning of the foot, combined with the medial rotation of the leg, places an inappropriate amount of stress on the knee, especially the ACL. It also creates a muscular imbalance on the lateral chain. The fibulari on the outer calf can become excessively tight as they try and square the knee forward. Leg tightness can continue up through in the inner and outer thigh, through the adductors (medial thigh) vastus lateralis (lateral quadricep), the biceps femoris (lateral hamstring). These lateral chain muscles

eccentrically contract to create stability in the knee joint and maintaining balance of these muscles with the other leg and hip muscles is essential for healthy alignment.

The muscle imbalance involved in Pronation Distortion Syndrome can also continue up into the hip and spine, creating bursitis, facet and disc pain, lateral pelvic tilt and even at an extreme scoliosis.

Pronation Distortion Syndrome patterning can be prevented on your yoga mat by following the simple rule that, whether it be for standing poses, squats, lunges, seated poses or backbends, the knees should follow the direction of the toes and of course allowances should be made for individual postural holding patterns. For Warrior One, you can allow the hips to tip out the side a little, diagonal the back foot from 45o to 60o and widen the feet from a tightrope to a train track to create more space for the SI joint. Or, if like me you want to have the back foot off the diagonal altogether and completely aligned in accordance with the hips, use Crescent pose instead.

CAROL MURPHY

Carol Murphy has been teaching yoga for 30 years and has been training teachers in Ireland and internationally for 13 years with her training school Green Lotus Yoga. She is also a neuro-muscular physical therapist with a keen interest in yoga anatomy and alignment. She teaches yoga anatomy CPD trainings, 200hr and 300hr trainings and is currently writing a book on where yoga anatomy connects with universal principles of alignment which is expected to be published before June 2020.



ABOVE
Picture credit: Intuition, Model:Numba
Pinkerton, Photographer: Anna Isola Crolla
(From Inbetween Your Warrior Guide



RIGHT
Picture credit: UnderWorld,
Model:Mairi McLean,
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Julie McGuire (From Inbetween
Your Warrior Guide



INBETWEEN YOUR WARRIOR GUIDE

Inbetween Your Warrior Guide is a journal of empowering stories, layered with raw beauty and insightful wisdom to life. Written by Louise Wallace

“We are all imperfect” - a wonderful opener written as a note to the reader. A reminder that we are enough. This journal allows us to explore, play and ultimately find our own inner strength and self-worth.

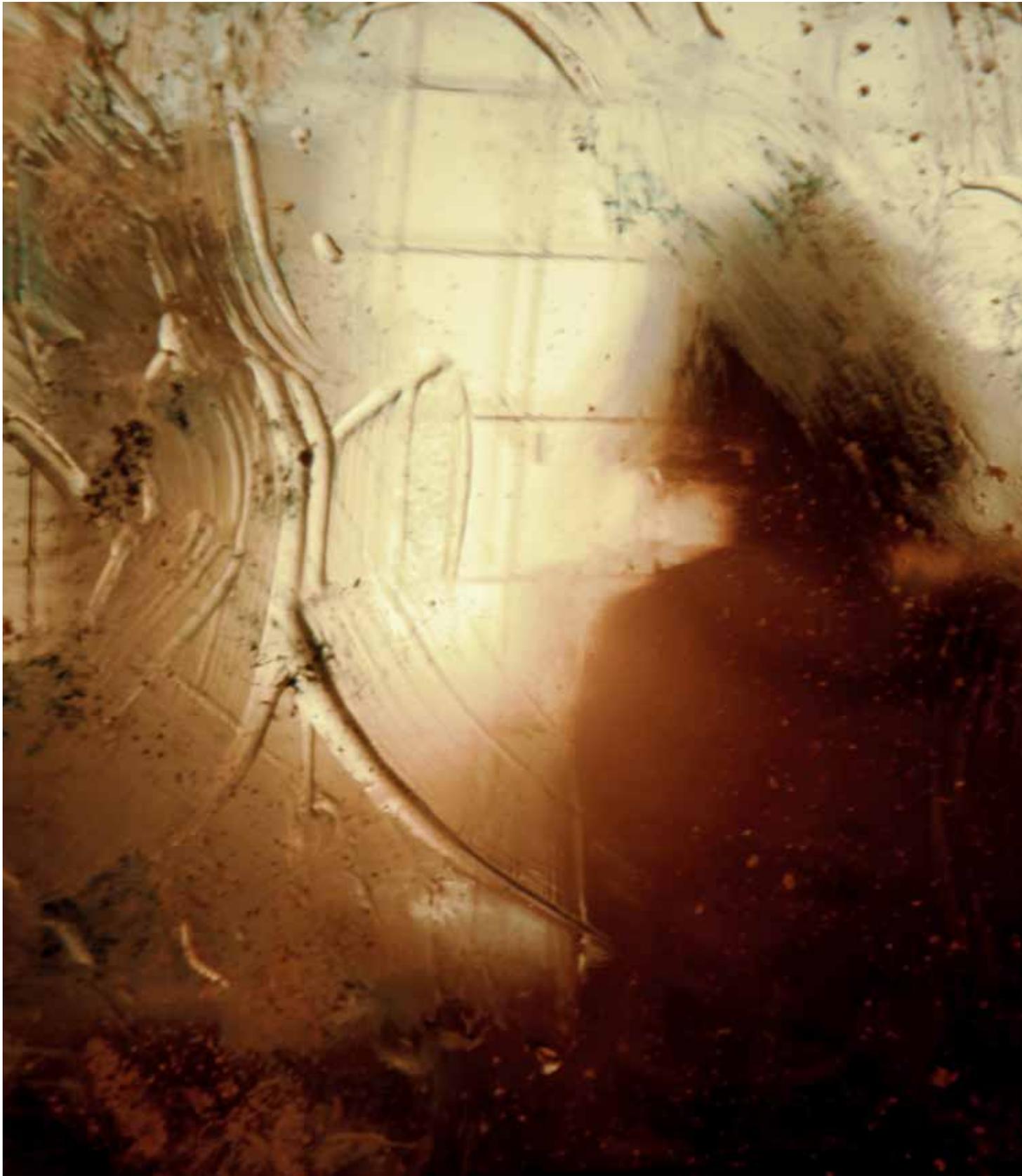
Presented by two friends over a span of over 10 years, they curated tips and suggestions to help us through the highs and lows of life. They share their stories with The Warrior Sisters, a bevy of 12 female archetypes to offer practical and nourishing remedies. Their honest accounts of life experiences are refreshing and their approaches are inspiring.

The stunning artwork lends this gem to sit beautifully as a coffee table book, but delve deeper and you’ll lose yourself for days. Here, we are invited to open our minds to our own potential, to release ourselves from the shackles we created, through guidance from heartfelt stories and inspiring quotes.

Inbetween Your Warrior Guide celebrates the feminine and brings us back to ourselves. Yoga is one of the practical tools featured in each of The Warrior Sisters, which helps us find stillness and strength to face our challenges and to let go of what no longer serves us.

Journaling, meditating and yoga are wonderful tools to feel grounded and this book acts as a guide on using these practices to find peace and strength. We are encouraged to doodle and write in this journal....to explore ourselves on these pages and to make this book our best friend. This is easy to do - it is a fun space to make our own. Inbetween Your Warrior Guide cleverly manages to sooth us and excite us at the same time.

I bought this charming book as a gift for my yogi friend... but I couldn’t put it down, so I bought one for myself too. It is a magical gift to give yourself or another, for it is a feast for the eyes and touches the soul.



DON'T JUST SIT THERE!

It has been said that seated meditation is seen as the real deal in esoteric and mystical imagery. Whether this has any truth, many people believe sitting to access connection with a larger consciousness is the 'right way'.

Simply confining meditation to sitting not only misses a variety of ways in which to connect inwards, but can also be a limitation for those for whom a hunched posture is the norm. Often this is accompanied by thrusting the chin forward, creating compression at the base of the skull, making it difficult to find open, spacious, awareness in the brain stem. Alternative positions not only offer a different viewpoint and experience, but (alongside asana) help unravel these patterns and move in the direction of rising up rather than collapsing down (in body and in experience) during meditation.

Four different states for mindfulness are described in the Buddhist text, the Mahāsatipathāna Sutta; "The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness",

"..... a monk, when walking, knows that he is walking, when standing, knows that he is standing, when sitting, knows that he is sitting, when lying down, knows that he is lying down. In whatever way his body is disposed, he knows that that is how it is."

This conscious recognition of 'body as body' within mindfulness cultivates clarity of what is internal and what is external; enough to know where things are, but not so much that it encourages "clinging to the world" and over-attachment to the purely physical.

Changing our relationship with the ground

Different body placing for meditation – sitting, standing, walking and lying - can not only reflect our changing needs, but also offer their own specific inherent qualities.

The placing of our head, in relation to our body and in relation to the ground has different implications for



the nervous system; affecting the responses of our more primal, unconscious, instinctive, 'old' back brain and brainstem and the more modern, 'evolved' and cognitive frontal lobe where we can choose to consciously process what happens to us or what arises from our unconscious.

As we are bipedal (we stand upright on two legs), much of our neurochemistry is bound up in how we calibrate the curves of our spine vertically up from the ground. Changing the relative positions of our brain, spine and the ground creates shifts in consciousness and can keep us adaptive, responsive and open to change.

As much of my practice, teaching and research focusses on stress and trauma, I am always drawn to a foundation of grounding to help hold a space for meditative states and how to best find this for the individual – especially in the overstimulating, information-rich and 'heady' world. As I wrote in my book *Yoga Therapy for Digestive Health*;

“Grounding is to feel a full, physical sense of where we are, as we are right now, including our relationship to the earth that holds us up and gravity that pushes us down – the basis of trust in ourselves.”

Of these four states, three have the spine upright from

the ground, which awakens the brain stem; resets the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system and allows us to move beyond fear and doubt. Here we focus on standing, sitting and lying meditation as less usual routes to Dhyana for the yogi.

Standing Meditation

Standing is a wonderful, embodied and grounding way to practice, offering presence and strength in the legs, especially within the prana or qi (chi) of nature.

It may be more associated with Daoist-based practices such as t'ai chi and qi gong. Whether referred to as 'stand like a tree' or 'standing pole', practitioners hold standing postures to cultivate mental and physical relaxation, tranquillity, awareness and power. They train the body to use muscles in a 'postural' way (to hold and contain stillness), rather than a 'phasic' way where muscle is used for movement. As with any polarity, moving and stillness are neither more or less important than each other and we constantly move between them. Standing still is where they meet and as our postural muscles must continually react against gravity to keep us up, there is an inherent action here that keeps us internally awake.

This might appear to be similar to Tadasana (mountain

pose) in yoga, but the form has more softness through the knees, feet hip-width apart and a sense of settling in for the duration. A common instruction in t'ai chi or qi gong is to imagine there is a balloon between your knees, and your head is suspended by a piece of string. The mindful focus can then continually notice and modulate when posture can tend to collapse or become rigid or tense.

Positioning the feet underneath the sitting bones has a natural stability that also allows width and softness in the lower back. This is where we can naturally rise up through the front spine and feel buoyancy in the chest as we breathe; a holding to sense the continually shifting back to the centre line through gravity as a mindful focus. Feeling this standing can help us bring it to sitting.

Punctuating asana with standing meditation allows the ripples of the previous practice to be felt wholly and integrated – it is coming back to the midline, the central axis and sushumna, offering the space to 'be' after the 'doing'.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation has a very clearly defined focus of

concentration and as such can draw us into mindfulness. When walking, we need to navigate our path, even when letting go of the need to get somewhere. This can be very useful for those who struggle to settle into a still body and who feel a disconnect between a storminess of mind and a stasis of body. It can be a route to settling if the body moves with these internal movements and as such, walking can be a wonderful precursor to sitting. During periods of intense retreat, where seated meditation may be held for hours during a day, sitting may be alternated with periods of walking meditation, often within nature.

The Mahāsatipatthān Sutta refers to walking meditation where, "a monk applies clear comprehension in going forward and in going back." Walking has shown to awaken creative ability – further heightened in a meditative state, or even meditating after walking (Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition, 2014;40(4):1142–1152) as it requires the simultaneous use of multiple parts of the brain; leaving less room for rumination.

At first the focus may simply be on the felt sense of moving and placing of the feet and legs. This can then move

to sensing lightness of the foot when lifting it, movement of the foot pushing forward, heaviness when it descends and then the touch of the heel on the ground. These stages are associated with the four essential elements (in Pali, dhatu); earth, water, fire and air respectively.

Lying Meditation

In the yoga canon, lying meditation is of course known as Savasana or corpse pose. Stating this is a meditation reminds us that it is an invitation to dharana – concentration, single focus and steadiness. Throughout the physical practice that comes before, we are differentiating and focusing on specific body parts, Savasana is where we integrate and bring ourselves ‘back’ to the whole that we always were.

Savasana can be practiced at the end of a physical

or meditative time, or as a standalone practice if we are exhausted and in need of this restoration. A daily 20-minute Savasana practice can provide the nurture that many are crying out for. If a person falls asleep in savasana, they probably needed it and may need more regular quality sleep and rest.

Dropping into a calm, soft, parasympathetic nervous system state is completely possible sitting or standing, but for a brain on heightened alert, difficulty switching off makes relaxation states impossible.

In Savasana we are looking to find that balance between dropping into the parasympathetic with enough active, alert sympathetic mode to remain awake (bodhi) and attentive, so that when we can come out feeling refreshed, not groggy - a ‘conscious nap’.

CHARLOTTE WATTS

Charlotte Watts is a Senior Yoga Teacher and Teacher Trainer with Yoga Alliance Professionals and has been teaching since 2010. She trained at the Vajrasati Yoga School of Yoga in Brighton, trained with many teachers since and now continues to study with Tias Little and Joanne Avison as they combine her love of mindful, somatic practice, yoga as meditation and an explorative and compassionate attitude. Charlotte lectures for The Minded Institute, trains yoga teachers on the Yogacampus courses Teaching Yoga for Stress and Burnout, and for ME/CFS; as well as running her own courses on Yoga for Healing and Recovery and retreats for yoga teachers. She is also an award-winning nutritionist, practicing since 2000 and specialising in stress-related and fatigue conditions and burnout. She is the author of many other books, including “Yoga Therapy for Digestive Health” (Singing Dragon 2018), “Good Mood Food” (Nourish 2018) and “The De-Stress Effect” (Hay House 2015).

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