

Your Wound is Your Gift

by

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Acknowledgments

Without the support of friends and colleagues through their writing, wisdom and conversation, writing this book would have been much harder. Also, without the opportunity to take the time in a quiet place where the force of nature is still very strong, I don't think I would have begun to heal, integrate and offer something I hope is of value. I'd like to thank Bernie Clark for his rational and expansive approach to mythology, Carlos Pomedá for his dedication to the tradition of yoga, and Douglas Brooks for his creativity and humour, making the material he offers engaging and relevant. Charles Eisenstein's work has been an essential matrix tying disparate threads of our history together, and Christopher Ryan's work *Sex at Dawn* has provided a very well researched look into our hunting and gathering roots. Thanks to Miles Olson for his practical approach to intimacy with nature, and Todd Caldecott for his dietary wisdom. I'd also like to thank my dog Roxy for requiring me to take a long walk in the woods with her every day, rain or shine. That above all, I think, created an opportunity for creativity.

Author's note

Dear reader,

This book is imperfect. The first printed copies have no price, so depending on your point of view, this book is priceless, or worthless.

There are no footnotes. Let me give a reason why. Here is a famous quote by the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679), from his book *Leviathan*, in which he describes the natural state mankind would be in were it not for civilization and political community.

“...No knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

The fact that Hobbes is wrong on all counts, and that this statement is groundless (and easily disproven simply by studying the co-operative, healthy and comparatively violence-free lifestyle of most hunter-gatherer societies before the influence of “civilization”) did not stop the idea from becoming popular, especially during European imperialist expansion. A mythology that we are all much better off working in the mills of the industrial revolution rather than living “primitively” in the forest is a helpful motivator for more

productivity, and provides the ethical framework through which to view the natural world as a resource to be exploited for the good of mankind.

Ideas like this, groundless as they may be, create a matrix of belief – of things we take for granted. So I have not included footnotes to try to logically persuade the reader away from that way of thinking and toward another – it is philosophies such as Hobbes' that require an explanation.

There are probably some grammatical inconsistencies, because this writing is how I actually talk. I could have changed this, but it seems to me each of us offers our ideas in a unique way, through not only through our vocabulary but by our arrangement of words. It is my hope that this work will appeal to that connection between body and mind – the heart, or the emotional body, to put it another way. It is a story.

This book is literally homemade. I hope some of the energy so present where it was written has been encoded into the pulp on which the words were printed, and that you may receive that too.

I didn't set out to create a new way of thinking, to affirm or deny the value of any spiritual tradition. I think that is for each of us to

consider as we keep our own council,
supported by what we feel is wisdom from
others. What I do hope is that you might read
this book as you would try a new kind of
cuisine. What appeals to your taste and what
you find nutritious, please digest. What you
don't, you can always put in a doggie bag. It
might taste better the next day.

Part One

Your wound is your gift

“From the wound, a lovely flower grew from somewhere deep inside.”

Sting - *Lazarus Heart*

Finally, I bought an old house on a remote island and moved away from the city. The island had been stripped of many of its resources over the years and, looking back, I think that reflected something in me. I had visited this island before when I was hurting, and it drew me again like a magnet, this time to stay.

Placing the motivation behind a decision like this on a single moment is difficult. Getting in the car to make the long journey to look at the house I'd seen advertised was the end point of many moments. Moments of feeling something was fundamentally wrong with how I was living, and that the decisions that seemed available were all versions of the wrong one. What I've come to understand, in bits and pieces and finally one bigger revelation, is that the answer to the question I didn't know how to ask was all around me in the form of that which doesn't speak.

When, during my morning walks, I started to become sensitive enough to feel the entirely supportive and receptive quality of the quiet, the trees, the sun and the natural world, I asked myself the question, “What is my relationship to these huge trees along the path I’m walking?” The answer was mostly ignorance and entitlement on my part, caused at least in part by being caught within habits and forgetting fundamental truths, like the fact that the house that shelters me was made from these trees. But then the next question came from somewhere else. “What relationship do the trees have to me?”

The answer to this question began a process of unravelling a story about who I was, what I expected from the world, and what I was really willing to give to anything I considered “outside” of me. This attitude was invisible to me before, and was (and still sometimes is) a deep wound. I’m pretty sure this wound is one most of us share – a collective wound. Because it is shared, when I looked around at others with this wound, I couldn’t see it. It is what we call “normal behaviour.” But like a physical wound, the body does what it needs to in the moment to stop the bleeding, including the formation of scar tissue. A hardness forms to allow us to keep going, to get on with things, to be “productive.” But the scar tissue limits mobility and sensitivity.

This book is about realizing we have both a collective cultural scar and a specific individual wound. My wound is my gift, and your wound is your gift. Your gift can become you offering, and your offering can become your healing.

Ownership

The way into the wound seems treacherous. If you have ever been afraid of becoming lost in the woods, the experience is similar. Even locating the trailhead to begin your journey might at first seem impossible, because we've had a lot of practice pretending there is nothing wrong. A good example of how we fool ourselves and how upside down our approach can be is embedded in the phrase:

“I want to protect my environment.”

In this sentence there are some key concepts we take as given that have enabled us to create the world in which we live. For example, “my” is possessive, indicating ownership, or stewardship. In either case, you possess the thing; the thing does not possess you.

“Environment” means that which surrounds you. That which surrounds you is not you.

So, you want to protect that which you own, which is not you. Why would one want to protect it? Well, the more magnanimous amongst us might say so that future generations may enjoy it too. Perhaps a more honest reason has more to do with control.

“I want to protect my environment” is a phrase

spoken by a person who feels separate from the rest of life. The words we use come from our sense of what the world is and who we are. What we consider our environment does not think it owns us, it has no need to. To me, the natural environment appears to feel its wholeness. Most of us do not, however. Everyone you've ever met probably does not feel their wholeness, their continuity with "that which surrounds them." We all grew up with the story that what is outside of our skin is separate, and not part of us. This is the cultural wound I am speaking about, so pervasive it is invisible. What is visible is the effect on our outer body, by which I mean the planet. How did this wound happen?

10,000 years ago, you awaken to the smell of the earth as the sun warms and begins to evaporate the dew. Your simple portable dwelling provides some shelter from the elements. Your tribe rises at dawn; children scamper around playing. You know everyone in your tribe, and they all know you. When later that day game is brought back from the hunt to be cooked, it is shared by all. When the sun sets, a fire is made and you observe the wood turning into heat, light, and ash. The smoke rises into the sky where the stars are so clear due to the lack of any ambient light that you can recognize constellations like old friends. When it is time to sleep, sleep comes easily to a body in tune with the rest of nature. When the

tribe moves on, you look behind and all that is left of your presence there are the folded grasses where your shelters were, and a fire-pit. In a few weeks even this will become invisible.

The idea of “having relationships” with others in your tribe is not a concept anyone understands. You have known these people all your life. Some you like more than others, but there is no getting into and out of the relationship you have with them. They literally are your relations, just as the animals and plants are. The children around you are everyone’s responsibility, and they learn different skills from others in your tribe as they move freely around.

This is a gift economy. Currency does not exist, and the natural response to the abundance of life on the earth is one of gratitude. No one has the idea that human life should try to be prolonged, or that youth is better than maturity. The spirits of humans and animals inhabit the earth.

(Excerpt from *Teaching Hatha Yoga* – by the author)

The scenario above may sound utopian. This is largely because through inaccurate interpretation of archeological findings and unfounded projection, we have been led to

believe that life for our ancestors was “brutish and short.” This was not the case. Nor was it the case that our human ancestors were less healthy, smaller or died sooner than we do. Eating a varied “organic” diet, sugar in any form being quite hard to come by, and walking miles daily, our predecessors were generally fit, healthy, and competent at a variety of skills.

Our nomadic ancestors' deep integration with the natural world made recognizing the continuity of all things their *nature*. Only when we began to coerce the world to supply us with more than we could readily consume, through the advent of agriculture, did we remove the idea of spirit from nature, for a gift can never be demanded. Once demanded, it is no longer a gift.

Leaving behind a state of recognition of the sacred nature of all things, a hierarchy of spirit evolved. Once removed from the earth, spirit was moved to the mountains – the domain of ancient gods – and then to the heavens. Up is better than here, and down is even worse. To ascend toward is good, whereas to descend into is bad. This “verticalism” also diminished our horizontal connection with one another. When you look at the history of organized religion, the representation of God is “higher up” – on a platform, a throne, or the top floor of a tall building. Why is it that we look up when giving thanks to the unseen?

The muddy, fecund ground of everyday life was now not sacred, and along with a vertical model of spirit came another model of purity – the concept of the white, the translucent, the unstained. Our instinctual, carnal human nature became less than spiritual, and finally sin and an abstract idea of heaven pursued. Man's purpose in life was now not only to restrain outward nature via the cultivation of land and domestication of animals, but also to restrain his inward nature. That is, to become cultivated.

The creation myth of Adam and Eve flung out of the Garden of Eden has been inverted. A garden is nature cultivated by man. Adam and Eve were flung into a garden, where they had to till the soil by the sweat of their brow. From cultivation grows the concept of “my land” and the idea of a world we now no longer view as a gift.

Ownership has created scarcity, because as soon as you see someone putting a fence around something it means it is no longer part of the earth's collective, which makes you want to put a fence around what you want to protect. But to protect from what?

We've put fences around land and around those we claim to love, but it is not love that motivates ownership. This is another part of our cultural wound – the belief that the rituals

of marriage, the signing of contracts attesting to ownership somehow legitimizes our heart's desire to surrender. Surrender to another is possible only when the other's love is seen as a gift, and not as an expectation.

So this may be a trailhead for you. The cultural wound is so deep, and we are so invested in it that even accepting that this is in fact a deep hurt that needs to be healed is confrontational. Tribal societies did not have an idea of property in the sense of owning land. Rather, as was explained to me by a historian friend, many of the nomadic peoples of what we now call Canada had a concept of "centres of gravity" – that hunting grounds extended out from oneself in a diminishing gravitational field, so that the land was not owned in perpetuity by anyone, but that individual requirements for nourishment were respected. This wonderful idea of course was no longer possible to implement after my ancestors in Canada appropriated the land from the indigenous peoples.

We in believe in the concept of ownership. As an example, my old house on a remote island in British Columbia was purchased from the estate of a family who had owned the home and property for many years. Their ancestors bought the property on which to build the house, and that property was purchased from a government that essentially took the land from

the original inhabitants. My home is sitting on stolen land, and yet I call it “mine.” This cognitive dissonance is felt physically. The indigenous people of Canada have suffered enormously and I am, in my participation in ownership, part of the cause of their suffering. If I think no healing is possible, if I believe I may suffer financial loss and emotional discomfort by pursuing these arguments and ideas, then I’ll probably rationalize my circumstances and turn my attention to something less personally challenging. I am invested in the idea of ownership – an idea I grew up with and accepted and integrated much as I’ve done with the language I heard around me and learned to speak. Taking the first step back into the woods requires some tenacity, and an understanding that this process of divestment of ideas and habits may take time.

Sincerity

Feeling the need to protect what is ours makes it difficult to be objective. Our honesty with others is often based on how much we have to lose or gain by it. Of course, it may not be true that we need to protect what we consider ours.

Consider winter. In winter, the energy from plants moves back into the roots. Dormancy is necessary for rebirth. We instinctively understand the natural cycles of the seasons, and when the leaves fall from the trees in our yards we don't go about suing nature for breach of contract. We know the force of nature cannot be possessed. A flower blooms and an apple grows...because it does. If our flowers don't bloom in spring, often we look at the surroundings we've provided them and wonder if we didn't offer enough fertilizer or maybe if we were offered too much water. This human sweetness speaks to the fact that we know that life comes back when conditions are right for it to happen. Often though, with our spouses or others to whom we feel we have "rights," we have in fact created contracts that stipulate certain behaviour, whether or not conditions are right. We don't own the force that causes the flower to bloom, and similarly we don't own the forces of love, desire or friendship – they are entirely out of our control, as is our own dissolution when we fall asleep at night, and the great dissolve when we die. Being sincere

about our motivations to control, own, and protect is critical to healing the cultural wound. If we lived in a world abundant with food, places to wander, and others to connect with spontaneously what would motivate ownership? What interests would we need to protect? No sane person lies to his or her detriment. We are dishonest mostly because we feel we have to be sometimes.

Each of us has interests. I have a body that gets cold in winter, so I have an interest in clothing. I have a particular interest in men's clothing in my size, and the styles I think look good on me. When I walk into a clothing store, I'm looking for what suits me. My focus is naturally and logically narrowed to my interests. I have no resistance to admitting this, because I won't be judged pejoratively for my narrow interests in clothing (hopefully). I also have an interest, however, in buying food, paying my mortgage, and appearing valuable and attractive to others. Others may judge my interests as narrow, as my interests may conflict with another's interests. (Do I really own the land I am paying for? Where does the food I buy come from – is it grown ethically? Am I in competition with other teachers and authors for an audience?)

As I move further into shared territory, my interests will conflict more and with others' interests, and the common response is to begin to mask our interests and even to be untruthful

about them. Conflict of interest is recognized in our legal systems and some safeguards are put in place because it is so common to be dishonest even with ourselves about our interests and how they affect our choices.

Honesty

We tell the truth when the truth supports our interests, and we tend not to tell the truth when the truth conflicts with our interests. As a thought experiment, let's say you hear a gunshot outside, and a stranger runs into your house and asks you to hide him or her from the police because they've just murdered someone. Would you hide this person? Why or why not? Let's say now the person running into your house was your son or daughter. Would you still have the same answer as you did for the first example? Most of us have a deep interest in the survival of our offspring, which in most cases trumps honesty and even the safety of others.

If we can recognize our deeply subjective nature and start by being honest about it, when we move into our own wound and the way we've adapted to it, we may have more honesty with ourselves. This may be a very private process.

Affirming what is true

Here are some affirmations you may have heard before:

“I am successful!”

“I am independent!”

“I create my own reality.”

“I am happy, healthy and whole.”

Affirmations are used when one doesn't actually know something to be true. You would never affirm, “I have a head!” because you know you have one, and you can check with others that they, too, see your head. No affirmation is required, because it is the truth.

Here are some affirmations you may not have heard before:

“I don't know what success is.”

“I don't need to rely on anyone, and I often feel alone.”

“I tell myself stories to feel better temporarily.”

“I don't know what it means to be whole.”

For me, these affirmations resonate with more truth than the first four. Without honesty, we have no compass to follow. Feelings of discomfort and sadness are not wrong any more than feelings of elation are right. Sometimes discovering a wound, or behaviour that is a

neurotic concealment of a wound is in itself painful. But it is true pain, and we do heal when our attention is directed in the right place. A starting place may be in simply saying to yourself, in the midst of deceiving another – “I’m lying.” That might precipitate another group of affirmations:

“I need to be successful because I’ll be happier.”

“I’m afraid of intimacy because they’ll see how screwed up I really am.”

“I lie to myself about a lot of things.”

“I don’t know what wholeness is; I just want to be held.”

Speaking as a man, my first thought is that verbalizing any of the above statements is not...sexy. As a man in our culture, there are in general expectations based within the paradigm of ownership – a paradigm that resulted in marriage and the ownership of women. As chattel, women had very few rights. Husbands did, however, have certain responsibilities towards their wives – to feed and clothe them being two examples. Being a good “catch,” having a lot “invested” in a relationship, being “back on the market” are all terms that refer to your loved one as a commodity – something one owns. This makes sense when the origins of marriage are understood. The engagement ring was in its origin a down payment, no

matter how we try to pretend otherwise. When a man begins to court a woman, the cultural template is followed, usually without any awareness of what one is stepping into. One of the hallmarks of a deeply conditioned mind is not thinking one is conditioned at all.

So, to be “a keeper,” men and women have to follow invisible cultural grooves that lead to deeper grooves of unvoiced expectation. It’s hard to be honest about who you are and what you want when who you are is shaped by what you think another will expect of you. To truly step out of the conditioning would be like writing a letter to your lover in an ancient language he/she can’t understand. So we follow the template, and the template is one of ownership.

We have stepped onto the trailhead and walked far enough into the woods that the parking lot is now no longer in view. If we keep going, there is good chance we’ll become truly lost. Of course, our hunting and gathering ancestors would not consider themselves lost; they would consider themselves home, and the roar of the highway scary. We could go back to the parking lot and forget about this journey down the forest trail. The trail is, in a sense, a scar as well. A scar that is leading us deeper.

Belief

At the edge of a forest there are usually smaller plants and a lot of different species. Nearer to the centre there are more mature trees.

Occasionally there will be a mature tree the wind has blown down, or has fallen down after it has died. Nature feeds off the fallen tree and produces more life in varied forms. There is a beginning, middle and an end here, and in every part of this cycle of life the trees show no resistance, no fight against what is. I can feel the serenity in the middle of the forest.

I'm willing to bet you haven't created your own religion or belief system. I know I haven't. What I was once encouraged to believe when I was young were ideas that my parents didn't actually hold as truths. Why do humans seem to need beliefs, and is there any correlation between strong beliefs and our sense of feeling fundamentally separate from the rest of life? If you want to create a new religion that will be very *unsuccessful* you just need to do one simple thing, which is to not provide any answers to the question, "what happens to me after I die?"

Beliefs are what we insert as a proxy for experience. Beliefs about our continuation after death reflect our hopes and fears. If you are sure of something you need no mind or belief to support it, and your experience adds up with

the experience of others – you have a head, and others confirm this. If you could drop what you've been told to believe and simply experience, you'd then have an honest starting point of inquiry.

Cargo cults of the South Pacific

During World War II, allied airfields were built on some of the small islands of the South Pacific. The islanders living there witnessed planes coming down from the sky and landing, bringing with them fantastic goods they had never seen before, some of which were traded. At the end of the war, the allies and their planes and cargo went home. But the islanders still wanted the fantastic and useful things the planes brought with them, so they fashioned their own flags, similar to the ones they saw the airfield personnel use to direct the planes down the runway. Their belief was that it was the waving of the flags that created the magic to bring down the planes with their cargo from the sky. Of course, the control tower was in communication with the planes, and the flagmen stood out on the field just before they knew the plane was about to land to help direct the pilot. The desire for the goods from the sky motivated the misplaced rituals of the islanders. Not understanding the technology and sequence of events that brought the planes down, or even how planes were created led the

islanders to see the activity of the airfield as somehow supernatural or magical. But it was the islanders' vested interest in the goods that created the ritual, and ritual action is always for a benefit. If I can be sincere in my rituals – whatever they may be – and if at the heart of the ritual lies self-gratification, then I can ask what do I lack now that I hope the ritual will provide?

Faith

You have faith that your home will still be there when you return from work. It is not an absolute that your house will still be there when you return, but without faith that it will be there, you'd probably be a nervous wreck. Faith allows us to carry on with what's important to us without worry. But the faith in this case is built on a reality you know to be true – your house exists, and your faith that it does and will continue to exist is helpful to you.

As a yoga teacher and practitioner, I've explored my internal wilderness somewhat, and the origins of what we call spirituality. The word "spirit" implies nature is a separate concept, that's why we have two words – spirit and nature. However, it has not been my experience that this separation exists. What I have noticed is that there are things that are

more obvious, and things that are more subtle. Some things, like noticing the movement of breath and subtle energy while sitting, take practice and are not obvious right away. That's when it gets harder to correlate your experience with others, just like appreciating subtlety in art takes practice and attention. But the nuances exist, and they are not supernatural – they are entirely natural.

A strong thread in traditional yoga, as in many western religions, is that spirit and nature are fundamentally separate and that human life is not a gift, but a fall from grace. Yoga philosophy and practice has evolved over time, but a common theme in yoga is how to solve the problem of our existence. All yoga that we know of had its beginnings no more than 5,000 years ago, and probably much less than that. Agriculture and ownership, epidemics caused by increased population, reduced lifespan, and the advent of chronic disease began approximately 10,000 years ago. There is no evidence of formal yoga practice in nomadic hunter-gatherer communities.

Yoga may have been created as a medicine to help this new way of living settled, sedentary, and monetized lives. But many of the texts left behind by the sages of yoga imply man's nature has *always* been to feel separate, that life is fundamentally about suffering, and that a better life awaits through denial of relationship, or to

occupy a state of witnessing, to hold oneself aloof and even to avoid the bliss of sexual union. But I disagree. These texts were written long after the agricultural revolution changed the way we relate to nature. Trying to escape or sublimate our strong instinctual nature is a gross denial of the movement of life in us, as us. If we try to remove the surge of life in our veins – the desire to procreate, to feel one another, then the sense of separation increases. As the great comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell once said, “What we really seek is not the meaning of life, what we desire is an experience of life.” When you smell the fragrance of a flower and look at its beauty, have you ever asked yourself, “What is the meaning of a flower?”

Our cultural wound is pervasive. Our adaptations to it are myriad. In the next chapter I’ll explain my specific wound and through that process you may discover or see more clearly your own. Before you continue, here are a few contemplations that may help illustrate our conditioned minds:

Are we more intelligent than the sun?

What is the most important species on the planet?

If intelligence, as we measure it, is the ethical basis for our dominion over nature, does it follow

that a more intelligent species visiting

earth should use humans as they see fit?

The specific wound

When I was a songwriter and musician, I was vaguely aware of some sublimation of energy in the creative act of writing a song. Many great songs are written from a place of hurt, looking back on a heartbreak or loss, and through the writing process, of making sense of it and thereby healing it. It is not possible to fake this process and write a great song. Once the song has been written, something of the processed energy becomes encoded within the melody, lyrics and structure of the song. “You’ve got a friend,” “Blackbird,” “Yellow” – these songs went on to become great hits for the songwriters and those who performed them.

Every human being is in one sense, broken. All manifestation – everything we see around us, including ourselves, is in a dynamic balance. When a pendulum is swinging, its momentum carries it to each extreme until the energy of movement is exhausted and the pendulum comes to rest. It is at rest, but without the potential energy to move the inner workings of the clock and mark time. Human beings are similarly carried by a momentum. We are not at rest, and we do have potential energy that can be sublimated into specific action. The actions we choose will dictate to a large degree what

kind of life we'll live. One way to look at this is to consider that our momentum is created by an imbalance – an example is we are not male/female, we are male or female in general. The desire to bring balance to imbalance creates the motivation to act.

Your wound is your gift

The crack is where the light gets in, as Leonard Cohen would say. But we often don't see our wound. By wound I mean the prime mover that starts to swing the pendulum. This is usually something in our psyche and emotional body that was created at a young age, or even before we can remember.

I can remember my wound even now. I was 6 or 7 years old, and I remember hearing my parents fighting regularly, and how uncomfortable I felt. One evening, while they were yelling at each other again in the bedroom across from mine, I had a very strong desire, a hope and an intention, that if something resonant and beautiful could somehow come out of me, my parents would hear this beautiful sound, stop fighting and come and sit with me. I became a songwriter, a musician and later a yoga teacher without remembering that night for 40 years.

I think I've created some helpful and beautiful

resonance through my work. It wasn't until recently, however, that I became aware of the wound, and that it was the wound that created the gift. I've been told I'm quite good at explaining complex things and making them pretty easy to understand. That too, comes from needing to be understood, and being deeply motivated to make it so.

Looking at the trees and plants along our path going deeper into the forest, it certainly seems the planet is perfectly balanced, and that humanity is deeply imbalanced. Why we left our hunting and gathering ways and moved toward settlement and ownership is not clear. What is clear is that after the explosion of population due to the new ability to store crops, we could never go back to the old ways. There are simply too many of us. We are now motivated to create in ways the trees around us are not. Our potential to create both suffering and beauty is enormous, and we've done a lot of both. Our rational minds now never stop thinking and our bodies cannot sit still for any period of time because when we are still, what has been covered and ignored percolates to the surface of our awareness in the form of uncomfortable emotions and uneasiness – the sense that we are wasting our time.

This necessitates more doing and less reflection on the value of doing. It seems we are reaching the acme of disconnection with one another and

the earth itself as we stare into handheld devices that offer a facsimile of what makes life beautiful, walking with hesitation and without purpose, like the zombies we fear in the movies we watch on our devices. But like the cycle of life of the trees in the forest, everything has a beginning, middle and an end.

The end of an old story, the beginning of a new one

As you walk, notice the forest floor. If you look closely, you'll see that the pattern of some of the moss looks like an aerial view of the forest canopy. The pattern on the back of a leaf is the blueprint of a mature tree. The earth we walk on made us, like an apple tree makes apples. Underlying the buzz of our conceptual mind is a deep wisdom. We know on some level that the air, the sun, the trees, the food we can find here even as tourists in the forest is a gift.

Our story of ownership and division created currency, and our present currency is created with a corresponding debt attached to it – one that can only be paid by the creation of new money and new debt. Money is not value – money *is* debt. Like a game of musical chairs, there is never enough money to pay back all the interest, so we must continue to circle the chairs like vultures, taking nature and turning it into money and viewing the other participants

in the game of money as adversaries. Ownership has turned the gifts of the planet into commodities, and our brothers and sisters into either competitors or customers.

The game of money is almost at an end now, as the world's governments struggle to stay afloat, cities like Detroit fall into ruin and individual families lose their homes. And unlike our nomadic ancestors, we can't just sit back down on the ground instead of a chair, because all the land is owned now, and sleeping on the ground is called vagrancy and is illegal. Vagrancy – the act of sitting idle without employment – was the default state for our nomadic ancestors, who seemed to have worked only enough to supply their immediate needs and had no deeds to their homes, as caribou and fish do not own their homes and are also vagrants. Vagrancy has been at various times in human history – as it is now – punishable by imprisonment, branding, whipping, conscription into the military, confinement in concentration camps, or transportation to penal colonies.

What we've done to the world, we've done to ourselves. My feeling is that the deep disassociation so present between each other and our world is an attempt to deny the hurt of how we are living. We see the outer world stripped of its resources as we've been stripped of our resources of real community, the wisdom of elders, and meaningful rites of transition to

adulthood. We have few role models to show us how to live with grace in this world or relevant mythology to help point the way.

We are lost as a culture. There is no overthrow of government that would do anything but replace the old faces with new ones. We are on the last few pages of our story of separation from nature. Our cultivation has created food with no nutrients. The systems that are in place won't get better, they are now old technology unsuited to what lies before us. When there is a critical mass of players without chairs, when the music stops, the players will begin to look for a more co-operative game. We can see this externally, and it is happening inside as well. Each of us has a gift, a gift created by the wounds we've experienced. Becoming conscious of your wound – where you are hurt – is the first step toward making an offering of that wound, and the offering of our gifts without expectation of return is our healing, and maybe the healing of our world.

Redefining success

If I told you I was a very successful yoga teacher making hundreds of dollars per year, would that seem incongruent? Success in the old world – the world that's falling apart as we speak – was measured, if not completely, at least substantially, by quantification, by money.

And money is a great way to measure things because it is easy to compare and it is an objective measurement. It is also totally anonymous and cannot reflect the immeasurable.

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning names the immeasurable – “I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach...”. She knows that to actually *count* the ways would diminish her love, for love cannot be measured by any objective standard – and that is why we value it most of all. In the food we eat, we don’t want more calories, but more nutrition. In the music we listen to, we don’t want longer songs; we want more beautiful music. We don’t want more people, but good friends. And our gifts are not valuable because they can be exploited, they are valuable because they are beyond measure.

Our cultural wound has taught us that in order to be a success, our gift needs to be applied to the creation of wealth. This is why if you write poetry and show it to your parents, if they like it they’ll say something like, “Oh you should get this published!” If you paint, then it is, “You should have a showing!” And if you sing, “You should make an album!”

There is a good reason why our parents said these things. They too, were conditioned to

monetize their gifts. In the absence of true heroes, leaders and wise elders in a society, a vacuum is created. We need role models, medicine women and visionaries who have moved beyond the limitations of quantifying their gifts. We've tried to fill the void with celebrities – often young men and women even more lost than the rest of us, but seemingly more beautiful and more in demand. Creating art while in the back of your mind hoping to be celebrated creates self-conscious art, or applied art. There is a place for this kind of creation – a step or two below the spontaneous revelation of our most sincere gifts.

There is another reason we are encouraged to apply our gifts to the creation of wealth. We need money. Consider this sequence of events:

You lose your job.

Within a month or so, you can't pay your rent or buy food.

You are evicted from your apartment and are now living in a car or on the street.

The term "living on the street" is used because the sidewalks are not strictly private property. All the other property in a town or city is private, meaning it is owned. You cannot live there. There is no land on earth that is not owned now.

“Unowned property refers to tangible, physical things which are capable of being reduced to being property owned by an individual, but are not owned by anyone. Nearly every piece of land on the Earth is property and has a maintainer (owner). The class of objects - unowned things - are objects which are not yet property; either because it has been agreed by sovereign nations that no one can own them, or because no person, or other entity, has made a claim of ownership. The most common unowned things are asteroids. The UN's Outer Space Treaty does not address the issue of private ownership of natural objects in space. All asteroids remain unowned things until some person or entity makes a claim of property right to one of them.” – Wikipedia

The concept of ownership has now grown to include intellectual property – the realm of ideas, as well as asteroids.

Here is a slightly different view of property:

"If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea, which an individual may exclusively possess as long as he keeps it to himself; but the moment it is divulged, it forces itself into the possession of every one, and the receiver cannot dispossess himself of it. Its peculiar character, too, is that no one

possesses the less, because every other possesses the whole of it. He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me." – Thomas Jefferson

The traditional practices and philosophies of yoga and mindfulness arose *after* the agricultural revolution but *before* every piece of the earth was owned. A renunciate was able to retire back to the forest, a quiet place for contemplation. What this implies is that no one was going to come along and move the renunciate off the land, give him a fine or put him in jail. If a renunciate tried moving to any forest on earth now he would be squatting – I don't mean performing a yoga pose – but residing on land that is not his. Taking what is not yours violates the principle of *Asteya*, or non-stealing. Moving onto land that is not yours without telling the owners violates the principle of *Satya*, or truthfulness. If our current philosophy of ownership and property existed during the original development of these practices, and its effects were as widespread as they are now, traditional yoga practice may never have developed at all. To move to the forest now, the yogi must be willing to violate the law, to challenge the concept that all can be owned. Some of us embrace the philosophies of traditional yoga but do not challenge what economic expansion

has created. It would seem then, that our dominant philosophy – the one we live by – is capitalism.

You can't go to the forest, build a comfortable shelter, hunt small game, live with friends, and eat nutritious plants because you don't know how. There is no forest that is not owned by an individual or government, and your friends, too, may be afraid of the woods. You know this, and knowing this makes the earth feel like it is not your home. Having money, then, is the way to be comfortable, to have a home, to attract a mate, to be clean, presentable, and have friends and not be alone. These are all essential human needs.

But there is another way. You can go back to the forest and live well – you just need to be willing to violate a few laws. My friend Miles Olson has lived in the forest, foraging and thriving for a decade, and he wrote a wonderful book called *Unlearn, Re-wild*. He now teaches forest skills and speaks on practical re-connection with our source – nature.

Your gift may not make you a celebrity or provide you with a massive income. But that is not the measure of a gift. As long as you believe you must measure your gift against those of others you are living in an old story. A story that tells us your value is based on what you can produce, and not what makes you

unique. There are still many who believe the old story, and that story has been responsible for killing the great whales, fishing out the seas, stealing land, burning down forests and abusing and exploiting millions to make enough money to buy status and monuments to celebrity. A gift is not for sale.

We may be nearing the end of cycle of a set of values and expectations that have created the world we inhabit. There is a lot of talk about what money is, on what value it is based, and the relevance of alternative currencies to replace the debt-based money system that has created the necessity of seeing everything as a potential resource to be exploited.

Many of us understand gold to have “intrinsic” value, hence the gold standard. Gold is a precious metal, it can be used to make beautiful jewelry, it is portable, and relatively scarce. These attributes place it well as a metal of high value. But before we go too far in this direction, it might help to ask the question, “What is value?”

Value creates a graph of desirability. Things of high value would cost more than things of low value. But we mean value to a *human being*. A new iPad is valuable to most human beings, but not to dogs, and not to humans too old to understand how to use one. There are collectors of rare things like ancient books who find great

value in something others may overlook. So when we assign value, we must look at what most people (not dogs or cats) find most valuable most of the time. So value is a best guess, an average.

What is most valuable to most humans most of the time? I would say things that promote survival and happiness. Most humans want to live, and to live we all have a shared need for certain essentials. But this also depends on the circumstances of each human. Someone addicted to cigarettes might value a pack over human contact. Someone suffering from a painful and incurable disease might value a painless death above all else. There are many variables, but in general, value is found in:

Air
Water
Sleep
Food
Warmth
Human contact
Love
A sense of being valuable

If you put 100 people in a large warehouse for the rest of their lives with only these things or the possible means to attain them scattered around, as well as a pile of gold, the people would not gravitate to the gold. In fact, the gold facilitates none of what is essential to life.

So gold is not intrinsically valuable as is water or air. It is an agreement of value – an agreement that has persisted for a very long time to be sure, but a only a symbol of value nonetheless.

After some time, years perhaps, these 100 people might seek out raw materials from which to make art, and at that point the gold would become more interesting and beautiful things made from gold – things that could adorn someone to make them more beautiful – might attain value. Things like water, food and a bed to sleep in might be occasionally traded for gold. But gold is not intrinsically valuable – it is only valuable in a certain context – that of a society that has enough of the essentials necessary to live comfortably and has extra to allot to something of beauty. But even then, value must be added to the gold in the form of artistry – no one would just carry a gold brick around to look more beautiful.

Intrinsic means to “belong naturally.” So when we speak of intrinsic value, we mean value that belongs naturally – not value that is added to or created. Intrinsic value depends on the relationship between that which is valued, and the person assigning value. So “intrinsic” requires relationship as well as the qualities of the thing of value.

We are getting down to the true meaning of

value. Gold, money, jewelry or even the next breath would not have any value if it were not an event held in our awareness. If I were in a coma, my last breath would not be an event I was aware of. The Mona Lisa would have no value in the land of the blind. Bach's work holds no beauty to the deaf. Gold is only valuable if others hold the agreement – the awareness – that it has a certain value.

So it is awareness itself that holds the highest value, and it is an intrinsic value because awareness is aware – that is its fundamental attribute, one that cannot be removed and does not rely on opinion or agreement. Even death may not affect awareness. This puts us in an interesting position when offering one's gift, because your gift, as a form of awareness, is more valuable than money or gold. However, others may not see the value of your gift even when it is ready to be shared, for value to them may still mean only money, gold, or things that facilitate survival.

The quip, "Do what you love and the money will follow," assumes money is inherently valuable, as the term "love" implies "do that which is full of awareness." While it is true there has historically been a correlation between currency and perceived value, this correlation is becoming more and more tenuous as we move toward the end of our collective agreement that money has value. Currencies

have lost all of their value before, and it will very likely happen again – this time to the currency we are using.

Your gift has inherent value. Your ability to see the beauty in another and explain to them what you see in terms they understand and can accept is valuable. Your capacity to listen to someone work through a painful or joyful event and through this process become more aware and mature in their understanding is valuable. The ability to sit with yourself comfortably without becoming so uneasy with arising memories and emotions that you are driven to distract yourself by shopping for things you don't need, made by someone who does not want to be making what your are buying, brought to you by someone who doesn't want to drive the truck that brought it there, sold to you by a cashier who doesn't want to be there but must, to pay for the things she bought that she doesn't need.... is valuable. The gifts of awareness lie outside the bounds of what our culture has agreed are valuable.

Catching your breath

When you've been moving too fast, too hard, for too long, the lungs can no longer supply the blood with enough oxygen to keep the muscles working. You are then "out of breath." If you really push hard you can even create an

“oxygen debt.” It is usually only at this time that you stop to catch your breath. When working toward a goal – a finish line of some kind – the only thing that will stop you is the ragged, discordant rasp of the lungs trying to suck in more than they can.

To catch your breath, you must curtail the demands on your body and lungs. The symptoms of a heightened sympathetic nervous system – eyes bulging, heart in your throat – begin to diminish as you rest. When you are out of breath it is hard to receive the subtlety and beauty of each breath. Each breath is taken in haste, not received with appreciation. As the heartbeat slows down and the breath becomes longer and smoother, it is like a baseball catcher receiving a fastball. The catcher steps directly into the path of the ball – this projectile moving at speed – and holds out her open glove. The ball hits the glove and as it hits, the catcher’s wrist flexes back to decelerate the ball. The impact of the ball closes the glove around it, and the ball is caught.

The skill needed to catch a fastball is acquired over time, beginning in the backyard catching a softball thrown underhand very gently. As it becomes easier to catch the slow pitch, the speed is gradually increased. With each increase in speed more skill is needed, and skill and focus are gained with each catch. Eventually the ball is thrown so hard it might

look like an act of anger to a neighbour who hasn't watched the entire process. But to the catcher it is an opportunity to use all the skill acquired, and that is very satisfying.

As a culture we desperately need to catch our breath. We have a big oxygen debt. But we probably won't catch our breath until we are ready to collapse. Unfortunately, the skill required to catch our breath – especially when it has been moving so fast for so long – is not a skill we've valued, and it has not been taught in the backyard. So the ball looks like it has been thrown in anger, when really it is the cumulative result of our culture picking up speed, working toward a goal that now seems unworthy.

Our culture is a collective of individuals, and it is at the individual level that we might be able to practice catching our breath. We'll have to start with a slow pitch in the backyard, and invite our neighbours to play.

Taking a breather

We've been walking together for some time now, working through many ideas. I think it's time for a little break. There is a patch of sunlight filtering through the cedar trees and warming the forest floor here – let's sit down. Around us are a variety of plants, and all of

them are medicine for something. It is really as if we are looking at ourselves from the inside. Can you feel a very gentle breeze moving up from the cool moss towards the warmer air near the top of the large trees? Our breath too, moves in ways that regulate, stimulate and sooth our body, heart and mind. Our mind, emotions and physical bodies are a continuum that can be approached individually as well. Like the three states of water – ice, liquid and vapour, the body, emotions and thoughts occupy three states of density. Ice is very dense and hard. Water is fluid and changeable, and steam is very light and almost invisible. Like ice, the body is the most dense and slow to change, the emotions, like water, are fluid yet cohesive – sticky. The mind, like vapour, is the least solid and most changeable of all.

In my home I have a wood stove, my only source of heat. To keep the house at a comfortable temperature, there is some planning involved. The wood for the fire has to be dry and cut into pieces that can be digested by the flames. At first, I use very thin pieces of cedar and paper to get the fire going. The fire will never provide enough heat with just this, so when the fire is started I add larger pieces of wood that finally burn into a bed of coals that will stay hot for hours. There are three stages. To cut the wood I have three tools – a maul, an axe and a hatchet. The maul is dense and heavy; it carries tremendous force when in

motion and can spilt large logs. The axe is used to split smaller pieces, and finally the hatchet works great for making kindling. These three tools make possible a warm environment in which it is easier to relax, be happy, and think clearly.

The three tools to move into the body, emotions and mind are *asana* (posture) *pranayama* (breath) and *dyana* (meditation).

These are the tools of Hatha Yoga – the practice of harmonizing pairs of opposites (masculine/feminine, inside/outside, left/right, up/down). Through the practice of *asana*, I come to recognize the source of the flowering of pairs and I enjoy the differences. Hatha yoga performed with sensitivity and regular practice will move your awareness to discordant energies stuck in the body/heart/mind. Put another way, the practice gives you the strength and patience to see your wound.

Asana, or the practice of placing the breath inside movement, is usually done first. As you would use a maul to split a large piece of wood, the dynamic action of muscular engagement and simultaneous stretching within specific body shapes opens the dense body.

Pranayama works with the current of life via the breath, with or without outward movement. This is a more subtle practice than *asana*, which

includes moving the body from the inside out, as well as noticing the rhythm of the breath. Patterns of energy stored in the tissues of the body are freed to move and dissolve, often with accompanying emotions.

Dyana is the subtlest practice of the three and works with and beyond the contents of the mind. The energy in the body becomes more stable through regular practice of asana and pranayama, and, like a tree branch that has been blowing in the wind, the body becomes still and content enough for the birds (mind) to land (become still). Integration and digestion of our experiences is now possible. These practices are crucial. Insight without an integrative practice can quickly leave, because the contents of the mind are as vaporous as steam.

I'll return to this later and explain in detail how to do a brief daily practice that harmonizes these three parts of our being. But for now, let's just start with the breath.

Pranayama practice #1

Sit comfortably on the floor or on a chair.

Sit with a tall spine and relax your arms, placing your hands on your lap or knees.

Close your eyes and turn your attention to your natural breath.

Take two minutes to notice your breath.

You may have noticed that there are two obvious movements in the breath – the inhale and the exhale. There is also a pause at the bottom of the exhale and at the top of the inhale. So, there is an inhale, an exhale, and a pause between every breath.

Pranayama practice #2

Sit as before.

This time, breath through your nose as you lift the roof of your mouth into a dome.

Listen to the sound, like water on rocks or distant waves rolling onto a beach.

Take two minutes to notice the sound of the inhale and the exhale.

Was your exhale the same duration as your inhale? Were the pauses between them present?

The breath is a microcosm of our life. When we are in the womb we form curled in a small ball. When we grow the spine unfurls and we become upright. When we age and dissolve our body again curls into itself. This process happens with every breath. The inhale opens the chest and bends the spine into extension – a subtle backbend. When we exhale we curl forward slightly as the breath leaves our bodies. Our first breath is an inhale, our last one is an

exhale.

The inhale is related to an upwardly rising current of subtle energy and to creation, and is receptive in its expression and effect on the body and mind. The inhale also increases the speed of the heartbeat. The exhale is related to a downward current of energy and is related to dissolution, and is a giving back of the residue of the inhale. The exhale slows the speed of the heartbeat.

Pranayama practice #3

Sit comfortably.

Perform the nasal breath with the roof of your mouth lifted into a dome.

Encourage the inhale to be as long as the exhale.

Take two minutes to receive on the inhale, and then give back on the exhale.

When we inhale, we take in life. During the pauses we assimilate the contents of the inhale. When we exhale we give back through distillation of the inhale. Receive to give, give to receive.

Pranayama visualization

Sit comfortably and establish your nasal breath.

Balance the inhale and exhale.

Visualize one you love, and inhale their exhale, exhale into their inhale.

Make your inhale fully receptive, and your exhale a gift to them.

I think we've walked, talked, and breathed enough for today. We are too deep in the forest to go back now before dark, so let's make a shelter of dry moss and branches, locate a stream for water, and sleep for the night. The sun will wake us up tomorrow.

Part Two

Locating the gift

“And I will never be set free as long as I’m a ghost that you can’t see.”

– Gordon Lightfoot, *If you could read my mind*

We’ll break camp and move deeper into the forest. We are on the second phase of the journey now – locating your wound. Our collective wound is apparent, your specific wound may not be. Let’s keep moving as we explore the inner landscape as well.

When you wake up, there is a moment when you don’t yet know who you are. All of your memories and habits are still asleep, and as seemingly sleepy as you are, there is a stillness that is often absent when you are fully awake. Our stories and memories tell us who we are and provide a sense of continuity to our lives. Our stories also dictate how we will respond to new events in our lives. Becoming conscious is not the same as getting smarter. One can assimilate knowledge and think quickly, but only within the parameters of what the emotional and physical body deem appropriate. The conditioned mind does not see the limitations. Your individual wound is not something you can think your way out of any more than you can think a crease out of your

shirt. On top of that, you've probably developed adaptations to avoid being with your wound. The first step in the process of sublimating your wound into a gift is becoming conscious of where you were hurt, and turning toward rather than away from the pain.

One way we stay away from the pain is to keep the mind busy and distracted. That strategy is pervasive now and creates a white noise through which little sensitivity can get through. If you already know what stimulus makes you sad, angry or depressed then congratulations, you have a head start. You can pick a memory consciously and take a few minutes in the morning to just be with that single memory while you do nothing. Feel where the energy from the emotion attached to the story lives in your body. If you feel a strong resistance to doing this practice, that in itself is telling. There may be a story about your pain that goes something like this:

"I've hidden this from everyone. No one is strong enough to love me if they knew how I was hurt. No one else I know is this screwed up."

Or maybe this:

"Everyone gets hurt at sometime in their past. So what. I have a good life and I'm functioning

just fine as I am. Quit asking questions that are wasting my time.”

Both examples speak to a lack of trust in our ability to heal. And of course it makes sense, for if the wound has not healed yet, why would it now? But like taking a painkiller to hide the hurt, distracting ourselves from the emotional pain is not a cure either. In feeling the prime mover – the cause of the pain – awareness itself begins the alchemical transformation that heals. When the gift – in the form of the wound – unveils itself in your awareness, then the possibility of offering the gift becomes a reality.

The body can be made strong through exercise, the mind made strong through problem solving. Our culture values both. Our emotions however, are in general still in kindergarten. If we are out of shape we stimulate the muscles and bones. If we are mentally lazy we study. If we are easily upset we...avoid upset. We avoid stimulation to the emotional body. Oscar Wilde put it well when he said, “Those who are shocked easily should be shocked more often.”

Our world cultures have been through two world wars and many other atrocities. We’ve seen what can happen when someone gets emotional. A philosophical debate can turn into a heated argument and then into a fistfight or much worse. Emotions connect the body and

the mind and are related to the state of fluidity, as water is to ice and steam. They motivate us to act, and are the reasons we do so much of what we do – to feel good. However, if we only learn to feel good we don't get good at feeling everything. Practicing emotional resiliency is not common and, unlike study or physical exercise, there are few programs to sign up for. Our culture is uncomfortable with public displays of complex emotion and when we do cry in public the response is often a version of "don't cry." This degree of vulnerability is often seen as weakness. Of course it is a necessary counterpart to health, just like collagen is the counterpart to minerals in our bones. Without the give to bend under load that collagen allows, our bones would shatter under pressure.

We are unfamiliar with our emotional landscape. We have few words to describe the complexity that is human desire. With no training or examples of emotionally mature individuals we default to what we've been taught, how our parents reacted, or simply become stoic and push the emotion into the body to be stored there physically. In a world that values quick fixes over the wisdom gained through emotional maturity, the prescription for unhappiness is often anti-depressants. Cut off from the ability to feel, our access to the gift within the wound is lost.

As we move into this dense thicket in the forest we've been exploring, I feel we should sit for a cup of cocoa that I happened to bring along. Amazingly, the cocoa is still warm and the rich milk and chocolate are very soothing at a time like this. There is a rock overhang behind you and if you crawl a little ways under it you'll see something amazing. There is a depiction of the hunt from the Paleolithic era carved into the stone wall. If you make a small fire from some dry leaves and twigs, the images seem to animate themselves and dance. In this hunting scene you see the deer trying to escape, and one of the hunters gored by the antlers of the deer. There is celebration as well as danger, gratitude for the deer's offering and gravitas for the death of a hunter. There is immediacy and richness to this scene most modern people have never experienced. Most of us have never seen a dead body, never mind someone dying. We hide away our aged, and the awesome miracle of birth takes place in a sterile, anonymous environment. The artist who drew the hunt on the cave wall wanted to offer his experience, to honour life and death and to celebrate both.

Both of us are going to die. Someday, everyone you've ever known will be dead. We don't know what's next, or if there is a next. Please subtract whatever beliefs you may have about an afterlife or reincarnation for a few minutes and just sit with me, with your cocoa, by the cave painting and allow the fear of the

unknown and the stillness of the forest to permeate you.

In the distance we hear the sound of leaves crunching under a regular gait. A figure approaches, a pack made from woven blackberry vines with deer-hide shoulder straps on his back. He is in his 20's and looks as comfortable in the forest as a deer would. This is Miles. It is lunchtime now, and Miles has brought us lunch.

Miles has been living in the woods for the better part of a decade, foraging, making his own cabins on land he does not own, moving when he has to, writing and educating. Sometimes the landowner develops the land Miles is occupying, sometimes a government official asks him to move. Often these people are understanding and feel they have a job to do or, of course, that they have purchased the land so they want to use it. Miles doesn't resist. Fighting "The Man" assumes the government representatives or the land owners have different fundamental desires than we do, and that just isn't true. They may believe a different story, and like us, that story may be partially visible or completely invisible to them. But they are under the same burden of ownership and "making" a living rather than living as we are.

Out of his pack, Miles unwraps a big pile of salmonberries, a bunch of thistle shoots that he

peels, and squirrel meat. He then goes down to a swamp nearby and pulls up some cattail roots for starch and cooks this meal over the coals of a fire he has built. We are hungry now, and the freshness of the wild food is tangible, the meal delicious. As we sit back and digest and dry our socks by the fire, let's contemplate the real cost of buying the nutrition we were just provided at a store.

It would cost at least \$15 for the wild protein, berries and carbohydrates we just ate. In order for you to make that \$15, you would have to work, and hopefully you enjoy your job, though most do not. You have to get to work, buy clothes for work, pay to have the garbage from the wrapping from the bought food taken away. Going a little further, you'll need insurance not only on your car but on your life in case you get hurt and can't work (because you'd soon be a vagrant), and if you own a house to sleep in within commuting distance from your job, you'll be paying for that house for a long time. At first the payments will be mostly interest, but eventually you'll pay off your home having paid perhaps two or three times the initial cost. That's a pretty expensive meal.

Walking through a grocery store, the components of the animals and plants have mostly been separated and processed. We cannot come to know the animals and plants by

walking through a grocery store, only how much the processed results cost. We also cannot know how the plants and animals were harvested, and we cannot feel the responsibility inherent in eating them. Foraging in the wild, you can come to know the subtle differences in plants, how to harvest them without overt damage, see the behaviour of animals and digest the gift of their vitality in a very practical way (a strictly vegetarian year-round foraged diet containing enough nutrients is difficult here in the Pacific Northwest). No formal system of ritual offering is necessary now – we eat in silent appreciation. When it is time for me to dissolve I hope I become food for what needs me as well. I can actually become nourishment for others right now through recognizing what I have to offer, just as an animal in the forest is a thing of beauty to behold because it is entirely itself.

Feeling everything

We are adaptable creatures. In the last 10,000 years our digestive systems have adapted to grains and processed foods, but at the cost of long-term health. In a generation or two, old ways of living are forgotten, and the new normal seems like it's always been. Our culture is now so fragmented that to be well adapted to it would be a form of insanity. Not being able to call earth home, eating a facsimile of food

and having relationships that are predicated on ownership and status instead of honesty have created in us a masking of our true desires and the ability to express them. Homosexuality is only now becoming accepted in some parts of the world. In the province of Quebec in Canada – the country in which I live – women were denied provincial voting rights until 1940. Our culture has outwardly suppressed human expression and freedom in the interests of economic expansion and increased status for what has only ever been an elite. Inwardly, we wonder what's wrong with us that we don't feel comfortable. And to this we add our shame. Because we cannot see into the contents of another's heart, we can only guess how they are feeling based on what they tell us and how they seem to respond. And what they tell us and what we tell others is often a staged version of what's actually going on. In Canada, we are a very polite bunch, in general. We use the expression "How's it going?" as a salutation, a way to say hello. A European friend of mine expressed her frustration at this because when she responded truthfully to this question, most Canadians she talked to didn't want to hear her answer.

Because we don't stimulate maturity in our emotional body, we don't have the capacity to hear another's pain without it triggering our own. So we avoid the topics of conversation that may be triggers – politics, religion, and

sex. Lack of stimulation of the tissues of our bodies creates atrophy. Health in the body is somewhere between too much and too little stimulation. The same principle holds true for the mind, and for our ability to become emotionally resilient.

To begin to train our dormant ability to hold all forms of emotion within our awareness, and to notice their origin, some formal method may be helpful. Those who suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder often re-live the trauma they've been through again and again without healing. The nervous system becomes, in a sense, allergic to the story of trauma rather than adapting to it. Others who have suffered trauma (and that which is perceived as traumatic varies greatly) self-medicate with drugs, alcohol or other distracting stimulus. Still others drive the memory deep enough that they function well in society but are numb to anything that might provoke an emotional response. This book is called *Your Wound Is Your Gift* because I've never known anyone without a wound – I assume everyone is in some way wounded, and has adapted to it in specific ways. Becoming conscious of that hurt, we have a specific gift to offer back, which in turn is a form of healing for ourselves and for others. It requires an initial surrender and vulnerability, which comes naturally and predictably when the mind says “yes” to the question, “Do I want to heal?”

Do you want to heal?

Are you willing to let life around you change because the healing process may necessitate that?

Is there anywhere you are not willing to explore in this “forest” of yourself?

Emotional Resiliency Practice #1

For this practice you’ll need a few friends sitting in a group. Start by affirming something obvious and true, like, “It’s cold outside.” Pause after you speak a truth, and have your friends respond first with agreement (nodding heads, smiling, but not saying anything). Speak your truth again, and this time have them respond in a neutral fashion – neither agreeing nor disagreeing, again in silence. The third time they should disagree actively, but in silence (frowns, looking away), and finally to conclude, ask them to agree again so you don’t feel too awful.

Have each of your friends take a turn. You’ll feel a palpable sense of density and unease as they actively disagree with your obvious truth, and a breeziness when they affirm you. Allow at least a few seconds to dwell in these feeling without moving on, without changing what you say, apologizing or backpedalling. As you do this you’ll become more aware that this emotional residue dissolves quickly. With

practice, you can begin to speak more personal truths and do the same group practice. This might get emotional, and if so, don't immediately reach for a tissue to give to a friend who is looking sad. That can interrupt their process and can mean "don't cry." Just accept their process, and yours.

Emotional Resiliency Practice #2

This practice is an active visualization using a strong emotion and fluid breath as a backdrop. You may want to start with a story or memory that evokes some emotional resonance, but not too much to begin with – your fluid breath begins, continues and ends the practice.

Sit comfortably in a quiet environment and close your eyes.

Turn your attention to your fluid breath.

Introduce a story or visualization that has in the past been something you've avoided.

Stay with the feeling the visualization creates, not the story, and continue to breath fluidly.

Maintain this meditation for a few minutes.

These practices are confrontational, so it is best to have some time to process the energy released by them. You may find that more deeply hidden stories and emotions surface as

you continue to practice (your practice is up to you, but should be regular). Be kind to yourself. Much of what rises to the level of awareness is not yours, it is the hurt of generations who did their best to make it through life, and unconsciously passed their conditioning on to you. It's not enough anymore to continue to make it through life – we've used up the nurturing heart of our planet in the process. It is as if we've been running away from a great beast, and here in a clearing in the woods we stop, turn and face it.

You are not alone. In different kinds of forests everywhere, heroes are now turning toward the great beast. We cannot with any honesty pretend the beast is external. No political revolution has ever removed the internal dictator of our inherited conditioning, our sense of disintegration. Now is the time to meet ourselves again, in this place that is our home, while it is still here.

Making an offering

We know on some level that the world we inhabit is a gift. The sunrise stops you, as does the sunset. Our inborn gratitude for what makes life good is clear. The taste of good food, the sense of peace in another's arms, a full inhale on a crisp autumn day are some of the gifts of life. Gratitude is a natural response. Religion

has, in general, redirected this natural gratitude toward a symbol of the source of the gifts, represented by a human power structure. This re-direction is a symptom of disease. If I gave you a gift and some third party stepped in and pretended that *they* gave you the gift and in fact, you now *owe* them, we might call that sociopathic.

Informal rituals of gratitude are often instinctive. Our ancestors began to settle permanently and expect bounty from the earth in the form of crops. When an expectation is present, whatever is given is no longer seen as a gift. Ritual can be a way to formalize gratitude when, due to distancing from the gift, gratitude is forgotten. Priesthoods developed as cultures became stratified, and rituals were made so complex common people could no longer perform them. Power structures based on an intermediary between man and a conceptual god further separated and perverted our natural desire to give back.

Our culture has taken the gifts of the world and converted them into goods and services. Money has now become the intermediary between us and the nurturing quality of life that surrounds us. Consider this forest we are in. An economist would say this forest is an “external.” It has no value until the trees are cut into lumber. However, this forest is abundant with everything we need. You and I could find a nice

piece of ground near a stream and build a simple dwelling to protect us from the elements. The local plants, fish, and animals have provided abundant food for the indigenous people who once lived here.

In order to turn the forest into money, it must first be viewed as a resource – something we can take for free and not have to give back. The money we use is created with a corresponding debt which can only be paid back by creating more money, which requires converting more of the world into a resource until finally there is nothing left. We call this an “economy.” The word actually means “frugality” – to be aware of excess, to live simply. Our “economy” is exactly the opposite of that. Goods and services – whether of any real value or not – are produced by taking what was once a gift, turning it into a good or service, and selling it for money. We don’t recognize our own inner gifts because we have largely forgotten how to recognize an external gift. Take again the example of the forest we are in. It has all we need to live in it, but most of us would die of starvation or exposure because our money never taught us how to receive a gift.

Making an offering is what we would do naturally and easily if we were not at a deep level aware that without enough of this thing called money we’d starve, be on the street, be

alone. And because there is never enough of money for 99% of us, we tend to think that our offering should be paid for. Even the very affluent are under this spell.

Your gift made conscious is your offering

Knowing what you are all about is essential to letting other people know what you are offering. Each one of us has a wound, and a gift. But that gift may never be recognized and polished. To look at the wound is painful, and this is why:

The wound has been with us for so long we are often unaware there is a wound, and many of our reactions to difficulty are somewhat neurotic work-arounds to avoid looking at the prime mover. This is why, although we all contain remarkable gifts in potential form, turning the wound into a gift is quite rare. When the gift in the form of the wound unveils itself in your awareness, then the possibility of offering the gift becomes a reality. This is where practice and dedication come in. Here's an example – I was playing some songs at an open stage years ago, along with other songwriters and performers. One woman came up and began to sing a song she had just written about a relationship that went sour. In the middle of the song her voice became tense, she started to visibly shake, and she started crying.

This was an unpolished gift. The potential for the transformative beauty of her offering was there, but not yet ready to be given. Once she could hold the emotional charge created by the song during the performance, her gift could then be a true offering. She needed to sing that song alone until that happened.

Emotional Maturity

Great works of art – music, poetry, dance, and writing, to name a few, have been created through the sublimation of pain. The artist is able to look into the darkness of her well of suffering, draw out the bitter water, and transform it into beauty that can be shared. In the fullness of the experience of grief lies the greatest joy. These polarities exist together, and the artist is able to allow us to vicariously feel both. However, the personal lives of many great artists are a catalogue of unhealed suffering. It is as if the artist were able to pull back a bowstring of their own suffering strongly enough to send the arrow of beauty into the world, but in the process breaking the bow. You could say emotional maturity is like a strong bow – to offer your gift consistently, the bow must be strong enough to be strung again and again. Traditional wooden bows are made by hand from trees like the Yew, which is both dense and resilient. Emotional resiliency is the process of being able to hold the full load of an

experience and snap back without breaking.

How a bow works

A bow uses the natural ability of the wood cells to both compress and stretch. The string of the bow does not get longer when drawn – the wood stretches on the outside of the bow and compresses on the inside (the part facing the shooter). When the arrow is released, the bow springs back to its natural shape, releasing the stored force into the arrow, sending it on its path with great force and accuracy. The wood always has this capacity, but in order to yoke the power in the wood to an intention to release an arrow, some technique is applied to prepare the wood and shape it.

We once had vision quests and rites of passage to move from dependency to adulthood – to go from one who only receives to one who gives back. In tribal life, a boy was sent into the wilderness to face his fears and leave behind childhood and self-interest, and then return to the community to be treated as a man and take on the responsibilities of adulthood. As culture changed, this hero's journey devolved into a young man going off to “seek his fortune.” Now the idea of getting older and growing up is no longer valued. The war against aging is a war against the natural cycles of life, and in that way, a war against life itself.

The wood for the bow is taken from a mature tree, for it is the strongest, most durable, and resilient. The tree has held the earth and grown towards the sky – in the process weathering the changes of the seasons. The Yew trees grow strong because of the sunlight, water, and nutrients from the soil of the forest, giving the wood its character of resiliency. Without a healthy environment the tree would not be able to offer us its gift. If we are to embody the flexibility and strength of a mature tree like the Yew, our relationship to what feeds us must also be healthy. Our bodies, with nervous systems, like rhizomes, and organs, like flora, must also be nurtured and rested. A technique like hatha yoga – the practice of inhabiting somewhat challenging body shapes and breathing deeply within them – fosters the beginnings of emotional maturity. For if we can inhabit an experience that is challenging and not flee from it or avoid it, that lesson can then be applied to our relationship to our wound, and the gift within it. The trees sway in the wind and grow roots deep enough to hold them to the earth. We can learn to do the same. In the last section of this book I'll explain how you can practice hatha yoga and become strong and flexible enough in body and breath to offer your gift, to hold your emotional charge, to sing your song.

Making a Self Bow

A Self Bow is the traditional long, straight bow you've seen in the movies used by North American Indians and other indigenous peoples of the earth. Finding the right tree can take some time, and after the tree has been harvested and left to dry naturally for two or three years, the trunk must be split manually rather than by using a saw, for the cellular integrity and resiliency of the wood needs to be present in the finished bow. Each tree is different, therefore each bow is unique.

Techniques of preparing and finishing the bow can be objectively applied, but without the care and subjective attention of the craftsman, the individual nature and strengths of the bow would be lost. In the forest we are walking through there are some Yew trees. They contain an un-carved bow within them. Your gift is not what you can do; it is who you are. Your doing can be standardized and commodified. Your being cannot be, however, as you are the only one just like you on the earth. The way you move when seen from a distance, your tone of voice, choice of words and sense of humour are not replicable. The practices of yoga I refer to in this book are like the tools of a craftsman. They are used as needed, in the way you decide is right for you to help strengthen body, heart, and mind in the service of your gift. What you assimilate is yours to integrate, for a teaching that is too specific contains potential toxins.

Refinement

We often consume that which is already refined. The gasoline in the tank of my car is a very potent distillation of bones, leaves, and trees. The sugar in my tea had to be worked out of a sugar cane – beaten to a pulp and processed to squeeze out the sugars. Not long ago a person was considered “refined” when he or she wore the most fashionable clothes and spoke with a certain accent and vocabulary.

The things that sustain us physically are abundant in nature and hidden within it. Eating refined sugar causes the body all sorts of problems because the sugar enters the bloodstream too quickly. We get an immediate high and a corresponding low, and no lasting benefit. Eating something like a vegetable requires digestion – the participation of the body in breaking down what we eat into nutrients and waste.

This is also the process of uncovering wisdom – taking information, often from various sources, and breaking it apart to find what nourishes us, leaving what doesn’t behind. Your personal yoga practice is the nourishment of your gifts. The process of practice, inquiry, digestion, and deepening understanding is a radically personal one. External “fixes” can seem to be the answer, but they are a model of intervention, not understanding. Intervention often moves through you quickly without

digestion, as it is the experience of another.

The process of refinement must be ours, because it is that internal processing that creates wisdom from information. Once we've done that, we become nourishment for others in teaching them to do the same.

The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell described the process of setting off into the unknown, encountering demons, overcoming them and returning to one's community with the gift of experience made conscious as the "hero's journey." A hero is one who breaks the confines of what is socially appropriate and sets off into uncharted territory. This is a dangerous thing to do, as there is no guarantee of safe return. That is why it is safer to stay at home, and that is why society becomes stagnant and unresponsive to change, even when it is necessary. Not everyone is willing to take the journey, but those who do have a real gift to offer when they return because they change the nature of the society they left. Our journey into this forest is also a journey into the deepest recesses of your heart, where unknown demons await. The mythological image of the dragon is the creature that protects the treasure without knowing what to do with it. In fact, the dragon may be waiting until you are strong enough to

confront it. Demons and dragons can be allies, not foes.

Not all of us will set out on the hero's journey, but those who stay home can offer a different gift – of welcoming the hero home. We can recognize and encourage the development of individual gifts in those around us.

You will know when you are able to hold the resonance of your wound, and through that sustained awareness, turn it into a gift. When you can tell your story, sing your song, or be yourself and witness the effect on those who can receive your gift, nurturing their experience of the beauty offered, and being the storyteller, no longer just the character in the story, your gift is polished. The journey is complete and you have become the hero... almost.

Part Three

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”

– Henry David Thoreau

Your offering without expectation becomes your healing

A gift is something you give, and when you give a gift there is a sense of ceremony, however casual. The giver wraps the gift, presents it at time and place when and where the receiver can appreciate the gift. When you open the gift, it really is all about you as a receiver. The giver remains hopeful of your joy but not dependent on it, as expectation turns the gift into a burden. The giver has given you something he or she hopes you will like and appreciate. But you are not beholden to the giver in any way.

The polished gift created by your wound can now be freely given, without expectation of a certain payback or reward. If you were to

expect your gift to be received in only a certain way, it would not be a gift. There is no way to know how our offering will be received, because every human has different ways of expressing how they are affected by a gift. If you as the giver are able to do this, you become, in a sense, a force of nature, like the sun. The sun shines on us daily and, to my understanding, has never asked for our thanks. Yet so many human beings *have* given thanks to the sun in formal ritual, or by just looking up and smiling. When an individual is able to give his or her gift in this way, the energy from the sublimated wound shines on everyone. We call this kind of person a “star.” A star does two things – it shines out light and heat, and it draws matter into its orbit. The universe is, in effect, embracing the star – it cannot help but do this. If you pause and feel, you will notice that the world around you, the sun and the earth, is embracing you as well.

The trees inhale our exhale, and exhale what we require. They “inhale” carbon dioxide and “exhale” oxygen. The trees are not bothered if you don’t take in a full inhale, their gift is always available and will not be withdrawn. The trees are resilient, and the mature trees have deep roots, hold the soil from blowing away, and provide shade and homes for other creatures. Often even when we become aware of our gift and hone it – the craftsmanship of writing in a way one can be understood, or

singing in a way that moves without becoming “cheesy” – without premeditated emotion – we are still conditioned to expect our gift to be received, or paid for, or we want to take it back. But we are part of nature and there is nothing that separates us from the animals, except that we’ve forgotten we are animals, too. And like our un-savage, kindhearted and humble brothers and sisters, underneath a very developed mind conditioned to quantify and expect something, lies a sweet heart that wants to open and an individual voice like no other that wants to offer itself.

We are constrained within an old story that suggests my value is measured by how much my offering is worth to others, and how much wealth and approval I can extract via my gift is how my success is measured.” Because of this fable, many of our individual offerings – offerings that may be immeasurably valuable to one or many – never rise to the surface. It is too expensive to take time to nurture your gift, you are too busy making a living, you can’t afford it. And what if no one likes it? Then you’ll be a failure. This suppression is deeply encoded into our language and lies below the surface of awareness. To illustrate this, take a moment and answer the question, “What is failure?”

Failure

You might say, “Failure is never trying.” And that is part of it. But trying to do what, become rich and celebrated? When you give a friend a gift they really appreciate you don’t need anything in return. That is why it is a gift. If you expect something back in a certain way after offering your gift, you have failed to give completely. Receiving is like the inhale; it naturally follows and is part of the giving, which is the exhale. But there is a pause between the exhale and the inhale, as you know.

Failure is a term that can be applied to mechanical objects, like the brakes on your car. There are only so many miles you can put on your brake pads before they wear away and they fail. When they do, you replace them. Your mechanic doesn’t sit you down and say, “What have you been doing? Your brakes are worn out! I’ve never seen this before. There must be something wrong with you and your driving.” If you maintain your car well you replace the brakes some time before they fail. If you don’t, you risk slamming into someone. Brakes are designed to wear away and be replaced.

Failure in offering your gift is simply not knowing when you are ready to give it, which is when you can offer it without tying your

whole happiness to how it is received. Your gifts will continue to evolve and grow as you continue to offer them, and it is in the willingness to offer them that you become more resilient and more able to give. There is no failure here.

We are ready to set off again after digesting Miles's great lunch. The trail now is beginning to dissolve as we move toward the centre of the forest. Old growth trees predominate and the floor of the forest is more spacious.

Giving back is in your nature. The way you give of yourself is up to you. If you are still uncertain what you have to offer, or if you doubt you have anything to offer at all, find a place like this to just be. Because of habitual overstimulation it may take some time for the voices in your head to subside. Those voices are often our old habits and conditioning speaking. There is a substrata of knowing beneath them, and it is from this place that your gifts arise.

It does seem that as humans we are able to traverse these three worlds of body, heart and mind. The cave painting we saw earlier was a natural expression, a desire to tell a story that would make sense of the need to engage in the hunt and in survival. We don't know what the experience was of the animal being hunted, but there is no evidence the animals around us are

trying to make sense of their experience of life. They seem to be at peace, and then instantly be able to act, and then relax again. Humans create meaning from our experiences and we have an innate desire to share our interpretation of experience. This is the process of making art, and the cave painting was the artist's offering without expectation of a certain kind of reward. His interpretation of the hunt enriched and developed a communal understanding of the event. Those who were not present in the hunt could imagine it and also add their gifts to the community, based not on immediate reward but in the pleasure of offering. We still do this when we tell a joke well – bringing laughter to our friends. Status in communities like this is not based on what you own or control, but on what you are willing to give.

We have been given so much. All my life, and perhaps yours too, I've been given everything I need. Our culture is one of excess. Too many cars, too much food, houses too large for the one family living in them. It is time to give back and not worry about the next inhale. The inhale will come, following the pause after the exhale. In this way we can re-align with the forces of nature.

Sun, Earth and Moon

Regardless of what may be objectively true, we tend to follow our subjective experience. When we stop to watch the sunset or sunrise, the feeling of appreciation is present. Viewed from space, there is never a sunset or sunrise. The sun is a stable centre that our spinning earth moves around, and as we spin towards the sun from one location on earth, it seems to rise. As we spin away from the sun it seems to set. We know this, yet I've never heard anyone say, "Let's watch the earth spin away from the sun, honey."

The Sun is like our body – more stable, less changeable than the earth. The earth is like our emotions – spinning, moving and changing, but not as changeable as the moon. The moon is like our thoughts – waxing and waning, rising and setting, sometimes veiled by clouds and sometimes sparkling clear. Space, or spaciousness, is what is holding these three. Spaciousness is the other element. So subtle it is ignored. Space is like our awareness – awareness without thought, emotion or action. We are nature. We are made from the dust of the stars, with an ability to become aware and create ourselves. The Sun, Earth and Moon, our body, heart, and mind rest in our awareness. Harmonizing these elements unlocks our nature. Looking at the full moon, watching the sunset, smelling the rich soil of the forest, or

listening to the silence after the beat of a crow's wings in the stillness of the forest, we are living inside a gift. Made from these elements, we cannot help but be a gift as well.

We have reached the centre of the forest. There are no trails anymore. It is here in the heart of your forest that I would like to leave you. All of us have to find our own way back. There is no map to chart your return, and no time frame for you to return. There is no one technique that will “work” for you, but in the following section there are tools you can make use of. When part of nature is stripped and clear-cut, it heals, with time. The cycles of the seasons will bring life back to what was laid bare. You will move back into the world with the gift of your interpretation of life and become a healing force for others who may be still shuffling their feet in the parking lot we left behind some time ago. As you offer your gift to them, the final stage takes place. What you offer freely back to the world will be your healing. The Sun, the Earth, the Moon, and Spaciousness – that is you – will shine light, hold together, inspire, and make room for others. After the deep exhale of your gift, your next deep inhale will be filled with others' gifts to you.

The Practices

Putting ideas into feelings and then into action.

We are made of the elements of nature. When a body decomposes it is clear this is true. And like the states of water – solid, liquid and gaseous, we, too, have an embodiment that is obvious (we have a body) as well as more subtle aspects. Being here physically is so obvious that there has been no study or experiment conducted to attempt to prove it. So how do we know it is true? We have our own experience (I can feel and see my body) and we have others' experience (you can feel and see my body). If I could see my body but you could not, then I'd either be a ghost or you'd be lying. We take the obvious for granted.

Body, emotions, and mind inhabit states of density like ice, water, and steam. The dense states are visible and obvious. The lighter states are harder to apprehend. If you'd spent your life in a very arid climate and I told you the air all around you contains water, that would not resonate with your experience. But if you'd lived your life in the humidity of New Orleans, you could literally feel the water in the air. We contain these layers of subtlety within ourselves as well, and the more subtle layers may take some experience and concentration to apprehend. No belief is necessary, just practice.

Emotions are a blend of our embodiment and our cognitive process. You step off a curb and a car blows its horn and swerves to miss you. The driver slams on his brakes. His fight-or-flight response is in high gear and he screams “Idiot!” at you. Adrenaline surges in your veins, your heart rate skyrockets in seconds and you yell back “Asshole!” You were afraid you’d be killed. He was afraid he could have killed you and suffer the consequences. The body is deeply involved and affects the way we feel. The way we feel affects the way we think, at least temporarily. The speed of our culture and the alienation from the contentment of simply existing has put our nervous systems into a chronic fight-or-flight response. Being chronically stressed lays the groundwork for illness. It is possible to move through each day with more contentment, awareness, strength and flexibility of body, heart and mind. This is where the practices we refer to as yoga come into play.

Ayurveda means “the science of life” or “the knowledge of life.” It is a system of medicine that has its roots in India at least several thousand years ago and is understood to be a sister science of yoga. Ayurveda sees all of nature – including humans – as being composed of five essential elements, and that these elements – earth, water, fire, air and space – exist in all things in various degrees.

Earth is the densest, and it is the quality of “earthiness” we are speaking of. Water is next, being a little less dense than earth. Water’s qualities are cohesiveness and fluidity – related in humans to our ability to relate to one another, to creativity and procreativity. Both these elements are downward moving, and exist together to create the constitution – or “Dosha” of “Kapha,” which in human beings is related to stability, endurance, mental and emotional steadiness, and contentment.

The element of fire is upward moving. Its qualities are heat and transformation. Our digestive system relies on fire or “Agni” to digest and break down the food we eat. If we eat too much, or too late in the day, it is like piling too much wood on a fire – it can smother it. Fire is also related to our ambition and desire to create and see results. The element of air relates to qualities of rapid movement and change, and so is related also to the mental process. These two elements create the constitution of “Pitta,” which in human beings is related to the physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects of fire and air – a fiery nature, ambition, and transformation.

The element of space is related to spaciousness. Space gives a place for the other elements to relate to one another much like the space in our galaxy allows the planets and the stars to exist as independent objects. Space is related in

human beings to the ability to listen, to witness, and to provide a context for the denser experiences. Air and space together create the dosha “Vata,” which in human beings relates to creativeness on a cognitive level – the ability to move the mind quickly. On an emotional and physical level, vata is less stable and more prone to change than the other doshas.

Notice that the movement from earth to water to fire to air to space is a movement of decreasing density. The body, emotions, and mind are also occupying various states of density. You can provide a nurturing place for your gift to unveil itself by creating balance and awareness in your day. Balance allows the various parts of ourselves to re-integrate. This is healing – remembrance of wholeness – not only on the cognitive level, but as a physically manifested experience. A daily practice of yoga, including posture, breath, and silence works to harmonize and strengthen body, emotions, and mind. An Ayurvedic diet and lifestyle provide the groundwork for physical, emotional, and mental vitality.

Yoga practice

Yoga means “an application of means.” Often a modern interpretation of the word is “to yoke” or to create union. Hatha yoga, or the physical practice involving postures and breath, came

relatively late in the development of yoga, when the body was seen as an aspect of consciousness and not a trap to get out of. In the 20th century this practice has benefited from a Western understanding of anatomy and biomechanics. Hatha yoga practiced with the age, predisposition, and abilities of the individual practitioner in mind is skillful exercise. On the visible level here are a few of the benefits of daily practice:

- Tone and elongation of muscle tissue
- Improved circulation
- Improved balance
- Improved bone density
- Strengthened joint tissue
- Decreases in incidence of insomnia
- Improved cardiovascular function
- Improved concentration
- Lymphatic drainage in inverted postures
- Increase in blood supply to brain tissue in inverted postures
- Improved sexual function

A long and strenuous practice is not necessary to gain these benefits, but a regular practice is. Practice is best done in the morning on an empty stomach, to stimulate appetite and digestion. Modern technology, electric lights and worldwide shipping of food are all very recent phenomena. For 99% of our human

history, excepting the last few hundred years, humans have gone to sleep when it is dark and have risen with the sun. Our digestive systems desire to follow these natural rhythms. Our appetite also follows the arc of the sun. We have strong appetites and digest well when the sun is moving higher in the sky, and digest less effectively and are less physically vibrant late at night. Therefore humans, like most other animals, rise with the sun, are productive and active during the day, and move toward rest and sleep when the sun goes down. If you stay up late and eat before bedtime this upsets the natural cycles of rest and digestion. Often people complain that they are not hungry in the morning. This is generally because they have been snacking late into the evening. Food eaten when digestion is weak does not become available as energy (as easily) and can be stored as fat. Undigested food can turn into toxins.

Below is the flow of a typical day following balanced eating and yoga practice:

- Rise with or somewhat before the sun.
- Practice hatha yoga to a point of some exertion and hunger. (15 - 30 minutes)
- Eat a good size breakfast containing healthy fats, proteins and very few complex carbohydrates, like bread or sugar. (An example of a good breakfast would be a large omelette with plenty of vegetables, and free-range

- meat, if that is part of your diet.)
- Do your meaningful work without snacking – you should not be hungry until lunchtime.
 - Sit down and, with awareness, eat a lunch made from plenty of whole foods.
 - Eat a smaller dinner near sunset – this will vary somewhat with the seasons, but finish eating by about 8 p.m.
 - Relax in the evening and go to bed when you are tired.
 - Make sure there are no electronic devices in your bedroom or blinking lights. Sleep in a cool, quiet environment until you are rested and ready for the next day.

This is, of course, a very general guideline, but essentially the body and mind are happiest when following a regular cycle and are well nourished. Snacking constantly on high-sugar foods increases irritability and decreases mental stability. A steady energy level is maintained over the day by eating nutrient-dense foods at the appropriate times, and not eating more than you need to. Stress and sugar both contribute to irritation and inflammation in the body and are strongly correlated with arteriosclerosis, diabetes, and obesity. A well-nourished, rested and stimulated body is the soil in which the seed of your gift is resting.

If this seems overly prescriptive, ask yourself what benefit you are gaining by pursuing habits that are not in accord with your heart's desire. We never get a day back. If you've read into this book this far, you may be motivated to offer your gift. Enthusiasm and hope are great, but dedication is required for your gift to become an offering, which again is why it is so rare. A strong and resilient physical and emotional body is needed to offer what you have every day, not just once.

To eat, or not to eat?

You eat breakfast, and breakfast becomes you – the food turns into tissue. Your breakfast fed on something too, before you ate it and it became you. Life feeds on life. Vegetarians may want to reduce the harm they cause sentient beings by not eating animals – a noble desire. Vegans take it further. But plants too, are sentient. Some would suggest not eating plants either, or only eating the food that drops from a living plant. If we follow this scheme of non-harm to its logical conclusion, in which we stop eating anything or doing any harm, we would then ourselves die. Starvation is a form of suffering, too, so by not wanting to cause any harm, we still cause harm. Even turning on a light is adversely affecting the planet and the things living on it. The electric power created by hydroelectric dams or coal-fired power stations

may be used to power our computers so we can update our status on social media and advocate points of view.

Every living thing is eventual compost for something new, and that compost is inherent in the thing that is new. This is true of things that live and grow, and it seems true of more subtle things, like a way of living, thinking or acting. New ideas move through phases of germination, immaturity, maturity and eventually they become fodder for yet another idea.

The desire to reduce harm by not eating farmed animals is wonderful. We could look at alternative farmed foods, or turn to foraging instead of farmed foods. But we too, are farmed animals. We are raised in a controlled environment, only able to live and move in certain areas. We've also been corralled into certain ways of thinking, that once accepted by most seem to become truth. Ideas like "marriage is natural," "there is an afterlife," "there are universal moral truths." So to a certain degree, many can only conceptualize within the confines of accepted truths. If those truths are incorrect, or if there are no universal truths, it seems the first order of business would be to find out *why we think the way we think* rather than acting on thinking that may be incorrect.

It is difficult to think objectively when vested interest is present. If I identify myself as a yoga teacher, I will probably advocate yoga. I make a living teaching yoga, so this seems natural. But there are times when my vested interests influence my objectivity. It may be true that another form of exercise or mindful work would be better for a potential student, but not having much familiarity with other disciplines, I advocate yoga instead. I'm not being entirely objective, in that case.

If I identify as a vegetarian, I'll tend to defend vegetarianism. When I look through articles on diet, I may unconsciously gravitate to those articles that support my beliefs about diet. I may even argue against another point of view before understanding that point of view or its benefits, or the vested interest that point of view may be coming from.

Perhaps a more objective and more helpful approach would be to admit:

- We have vested interests
- What those interests are
- How those interests might affect our objectivity
- That we really don't know it all and we may very well change our minds, 'cause it has happened before.

After some consideration of your own interests, habits, and tastes, a decision can be made about what kind of food you find nourishing. If you eat food your grandmother would recognize as food, prepare it yourself, eat it and notice how you feel afterward, that's probably a good place to start. A full exploration of diet is outside the scope of this book. However, I would suggest it would be a good idea to at least make what you eat part of a mindful exploration of what is nutritious for you rather than an emotional response to your life events.

Why yoga practice?

Most of us lead relatively sedentary lives. There are many activities you could do to increase muscle mass, endurance and flexibility, but I know of no other practice that can be done anywhere, with essentially nothing except your own body and breath that is as effective as hatha yoga. Hatha yoga teaches the practitioner to stay present with levels of relative discomfort of their own creation. It takes concentration to fire a muscle group and keep those muscles engaged for 45 seconds while stretching the toned muscles – something that doesn't happen with more rapid exercise. Because the breath envelops the poses, the nervous system stays in balance and the cardiovascular system benefits. Inversions, like the headstand and shoulder-stand (or their

modifications or alternatives), aid in detoxifying lymphatic drainage. The subtle increase in blood pressure in the upper body while inverted slows the heart rate, sends fresh blood into the capillary system of the brain, assisting mental sharpness, and tends to burn fats rather than sugars. And it feels great.

Lineage of hatha yoga

The myriad styles of yoga present today have their roots in the teachings of essentially one man – Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888 -1989), who re-invented hatha yoga in the early part of the 20th century, along with two of his students who brought hatha yoga to the west – B.K.S Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois. Iyengar honed, refined, and expanded what Krishnamacharya taught him, turning the asana (posture) practice into a therapeutic tool, inventing props and adapting the practice to suit every student's level of ability. Jois preserved and inflected what he was taught, and he, in turn, taught many western teachers the flowing, physically demanding style originally laid out by Krishnamacharya. What we see today is an expansion of the teachings of Krishnamacharya, and, with that expansion and popularization, some of the subtlety of the practice has been overlooked while advances in biomechanics have been made. Yoga is best

practiced in silence, at home, daily, using your own abilities as the standard and the breath as the teacher.

Dynamic hatha yoga

This yoga is used to stimulate the now generally sedentary tissues of the body. Essentially what is happening during hatha yoga practice is this: a muscle group is engaged in a static position. Those engaged muscles are then stretched by keeping part of the body fixed, and turning or moving another part of the body in such a way as to stretch the toned muscle.

Try this:

Flex your bicep by drawing your fist toward your shoulder – a classic muscle engagement. Now, keeping your bicep toned, draw your fist away from your shoulder until your arm is straight, without disengaging the muscle. You just stretched a muscle that was engaged. This is the basis for safe and effective hatha yoga practice, for a toned muscle can be stretched more safely than a disengaged muscle. The movements into and out of postures are relatively slow and guided by breath, so the muscular attachments never get abruptly pulled

when not firm. Mindfully, you become simultaneously stronger and more flexible.

Hatha yoga practice does something profound, though how it does it is a bit of a mystery. The effects of even a brief practice can be felt immediately. In the following pages, I'll outline how to perform a Sun Salutation – both a physical exercise and an act of gratitude – and poses to open the habitually tight parts of the body. Holding a pose that is not entirely comfortable or easy for even a short time brings the emotional body into conversation with the mind and physical body. Your practice is best done in the morning, before eating and before the demands of the day take hold. Even 10 minutes in the morning will make a profound difference to your flexibility, strength, and balance. Even more importantly, the practice will harmonize all pairs of opposites that exist in you – masculine and feminine energies, contractive and expansive qualities, the inhale and the exhale breaths.

Home practice sequence:

Shoulder therapeutic
Wall Dog
Toe preparation
Wide leg preparation
Standing wide leg forward fold
Standing pose preparation
Warrior 2
Side Angle
Triangle
Lunge
Downward Dog
Hands and knees
Child's pose
Heart opening pose
Toe and shoulder preparation
Straight leg balance
Crescent pose preparation
Crescent
Warrior one preparation
Warrior one
Tree
Sun Salutation
Pigeon
Wide leg seated pose
One leg tucked forward fold
Staff pose
Seated forward bend
Backbend prep
Backbend
Reclined backbend
Shoulder stand

Bound angle
Seated spinal twist
One leg crossed forward fold
Relaxation
Meditation

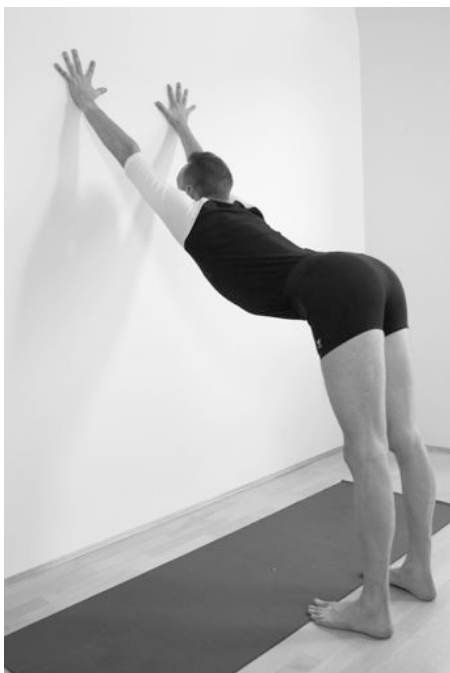
Each pose in this sequence can be held from approximately 3 to 10 smooth, long nasal breaths. For a faster flow, shorten the number of breaths. For a longer, slow practice, increase the number of breaths. Work well, but not to a point of exhaustion. The breath should remain smooth throughout your practice.

You can take some or all of the poses as a daily practice. The sequence given here will take approximately 30 – 60 minutes depending on how long you maintain each pose, and is a balanced beginner to intermediate daily practice.



Shoulder Therapeutic

- Lean one hand on the wall with the fingers outstretched. Draw the muscles of your arm toward the middle of your shoulderblade and stretch back out. Keep the muscles strong and the hand firm as you turn your torso gradually away from the wall. Work the muscles of the mid-back and keep the upper trapezius supple.



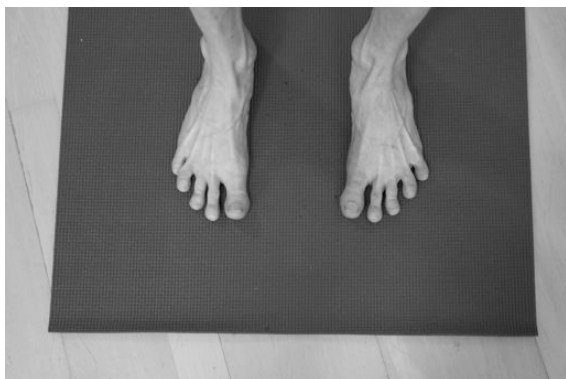
Wall Dog

- Place your hands shoulder distance or slightly wider against a wall a little higher than eye level. With your palms firm, step back until you can lean into your hands and a curve appears in your back. With your hands firm, lift the undersides of your arms toward the ceiling and bring the sides of your neck up so the head is not hanging. Breathe smoothly and continue to press your thighs back with lower legs strong.



Toe prep

- Come to your knees and place the pads of your toes on the ground. Lean your buttocks toward your heels until you feel some intensity in the soles of the feet. Now squeeze your inner ankles together. Lift and resettle as needed



Feet

Well placed and strong, your feet are the foundation of almost all the poses. Align your feet hips distance apart, parallel with each other. Lift the toes, spread them and then bear weight into the:

- Mound of the big toe
- Inner heel
- Pinky toe mound
- Outer heel

This will encourage a lift in the arches of your feet and establish good alignment and active leg muscles. Place your toes back to the mat, keeping your feet strong. Whatever posture you are in, keeping the feet active and working upward through the body from there will build an integrated pose.



Wide leg prep.

- Face the long side of your mat and spread your parallel feet apart so they are below your outstretched wrists
- Bend your knees and place your forearms on your upper legs with hands clasped
- Lift your toes and firm your outer legs
- Keep your legs firm as you place your outstretched toes back on the mat
- Firm your legs by pulling from your feet into the centre of your pelvis as if drawing nutrients from the earth
- As you stretch back from pelvis to feet, begin to straighten your legs but keep the curve in your back



Wide leg fold - Prasarita Paddottanasana

- Step wide on your mat and parallel your feet
- With legs firm, press the top of your thighs toward the long side of the mat behind you
- Place your fingertips on the ground under your shoulders and stretch your spine and gaze forward
- Keep the length in your torso as you fold deeper toward the ground



Standing Pose Preparation

- Face the long side of your mat and place your feet wide enough so they are below your outstretched wrists
- Firm your legs and make your feet strong. As you press down from your lower body, lift your heart and elongate the sides of the body
- Keep the length in your torso and draw your tailbone toward the ground and your lower ribs toward the back of your body.



Warrior two - Virabdrasana 2

- Turn to face the long side of the mat, spread your legs wide so they are below your wrists when arms are outstretched
- Step your heels back in line with the long side of the mat behind you
- Turn your right foot and gaze straight toward the short end of the mat
- Keep your legs and arms firm, exhale and bend your right knee until the knee is over the front ankle and your front thighbone is moving toward level with the ground
- Maintain strong connection through both feet, lift your heart and stretch your legs into the earth
- Gaze over your front fingertips, keep your back arm level with the ground
- Come back to the top of the pose with legs still wide, parallel both feet and perform the pose on the left side



Side Angle - Parsvakonasana

- Turn to face the long side of the mat, spread your legs wide so they are below your wrists when arms are outstretched
- Step your heels back in line with the long side of the mat behind you
- Turn your right foot and gaze straight toward the short end of the mat
- Keep your legs and arms firm, exhale and bend your right knee until the knee is over the front ankle and your front thighbone is moving toward level with the ground
- Place your right hand on the ground beside your right foot, keep your back leg straight
- Sweep you left arm up and over your ear and twist your torso toward the upper arm
- Come back to the top of the pose with legs still wide, parallel both feet and perform the pose on the left side



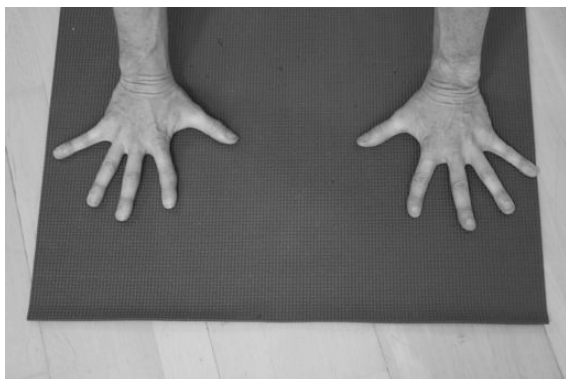
Triangle - Trikonasana

- Turn to face the long side of the mat, spread your legs wide so they are below your wrists when arms are outstretched
- Step your heels back in line with the long side of the mat behind you
- Turn your right foot and gaze straight toward the short end of the mat
- Keep your legs and arms firm, exhale and bend your right knee until the knee is over the front ankle
- Place your right hand on the ground beside your right foot, keep your back leg straight
- Now straighten your front leg, move your right hand back so it stays under your shoulder
- Reach your left arm straight up and with legs strong, turn your gaze and torso toward the top hand
- Come back to the top of the pose with legs still wide, parallel both feet and perform the pose on the left side



Lunge

- From Ardha Uttanasana, step back as you exhale to a lunge
- Keep your back heel over toes, front knee over ankle
- With fingertips on the ground or on blocks, keep your back leg lifted and your front thigh working down toward level with the floor
- Hold the pose with integrity, and inhale as you step the back foot up to meet the front to switch sides



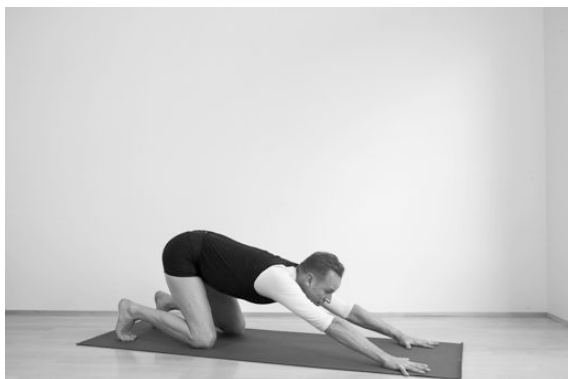
Hand and wrist alignment

- On hands and knees, place your hands shoulder distance apart with your wrists aligned with the front of the mat
- Bring weight from your mid-back into your arms and hands
- Press your finger pads and the outer edges of your hands to the floor to create a dome in the centre of your palm.
- This creates the alignment and action for weight-bearing postures on the hands



Downward Dog - Adho Mukha Svanasana

- To establish the correct length for your down dog, start in lunge
- Step your front leg back, into the top of a push-up
- With your feet hips distance apart and your palms shoulder distance, push back into an upside down “V” Bend your knees if necessary
- Keep your legs and arms strong as you draw muscularly into the centre of the pose
- Draw the sides of your neck upward until the neck is congruent and working with the rest of the spine
- Keep your feet parallel as you stretch your heels toward the ground



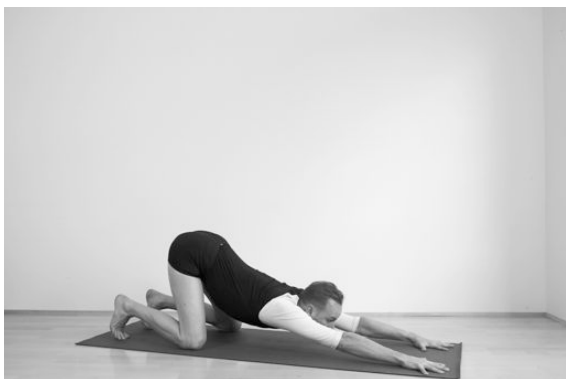
Hands and knees

- You can use this as a rest or a transition to Downward dog



Childs pose - Balasana

- Relax the muscles of your body and allow the breath to regulate naturally



Heart opening -Anahatasana

- From hands and knees, lift the sides of your neck to bring your gaze forward.
- Keep your palms strong and the undersides of your arms firm as you move your hips toward your heels. You may need to move your knees back a little more. With a curve in your back, lift your ribs and stretch your tailbone down



Toe and Shoulder opener

- Kneel and place your toe pads on the ground, sit back on your heels and draw them together
- Cross one arm over the other. Bend your elbows and place your palms together
- Lift your elbows toward the sky and curl back a little as you draw your ribs in
- Do the other arm



Straight leg balance

- From a lunge, place your hands on your hips and straighten your front leg
- Press down through your hipbones and lift up through your spine
- Squeeze your lower legs toward the middle of the mat as you widen your inner upper thighs away from the middle of the mat the same amount



Crescent Pose

- From a straight leg balance, bend your forward knee and stretch your back leg straight
- Lift your arms overhead, take the sides of your neck back to gaze up
- Curl into a backbend in your upper back as you draw your ribs in and your tailbone down



Warrior one – Virabhadrasana 1

- From Crescent pose, shorten your stance enough to place your rear foot on the ground at an approximately 45 degree angle
- Use the strength of your straight back leg to rotate your hips forward to face the short end of your mat
- Lower your front thigh toward level with the floor and stretch your arms above your head



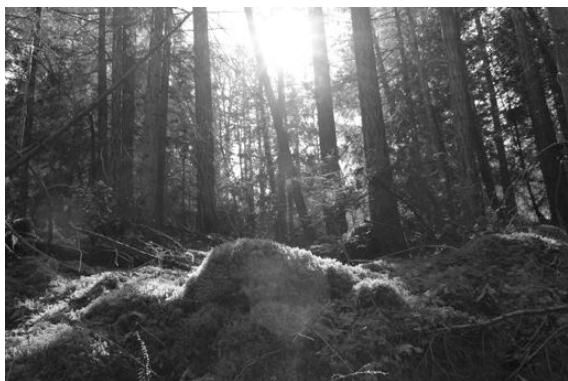
Tree pose – Vrksasana

- Stand tall and place your right foot on your inner left shin, or above your knee
- Press your foot into your standing leg, and press your standing leg into your foot equally
- Raise your arms overhead and let your gaze rest on one point

Sun Salutation - Surya Namaskara

A Sun Salutation is a series of postures linked with the breath. This sequence can be used as a warm up to your practice, a stand-alone way to engage breath and movement, and as it is named, a ritual of thanks to the power of life in the form of the sun.

The following postures are the components of Surya Namaskara. You can learn each pose individually and then flow them together using one breath per pose.





Upward hands - Urdhva Hastasana

- With an inhale, reach your arms forward and up toward the sky as you press your feet down
- Keep your legs strong, don't allow your ribs to lift up and your low back to bend
- Exhale to lower your arms to your sides, keep the torso buoyant



Forward fold – Uttanasana

- From upward hands pose exhale and fold at the hips
- Bend your elbows to face the sides of our mat
- Place fingertips or palms on the ground
- Keep your arms and legs working as you stretch from your tailbone toward the earth and from just above the tailbone up through the spine to the crown of the head



Half forward fold - Ardha Uttanasana

- From Uttanasana, with fingertips or palms on the ground inhale, look forward and stretch your spine forward
- As you stretch forward, keep your feet rooted and press the top of your legs toward the back of your mat



Downward Dog - Adho Mukha Svanasana

- From Ardha Uttanasana, exhale and step back into an upside down “V”
- Keep your legs and arms strong as you draw muscularly into the centre of the pose
- Draw the sides of your neck upward until the neck is congruent and working with the rest of the spine
- Stretch your heels toward the mat, press your hands downward as you work to straighten your arms
- Take a full inhale and exhale



High Plank - Phalakasana

- From Downward Dog, on an inhale move to the top of a push-up with your heels over your toes and your shoulders over your wrists
- Keeping both legs firm and lifting toward the sky, draw your tailbone toward your heels until your belly tones
- Draw the side of your neck up, until your gaze is slightly forward



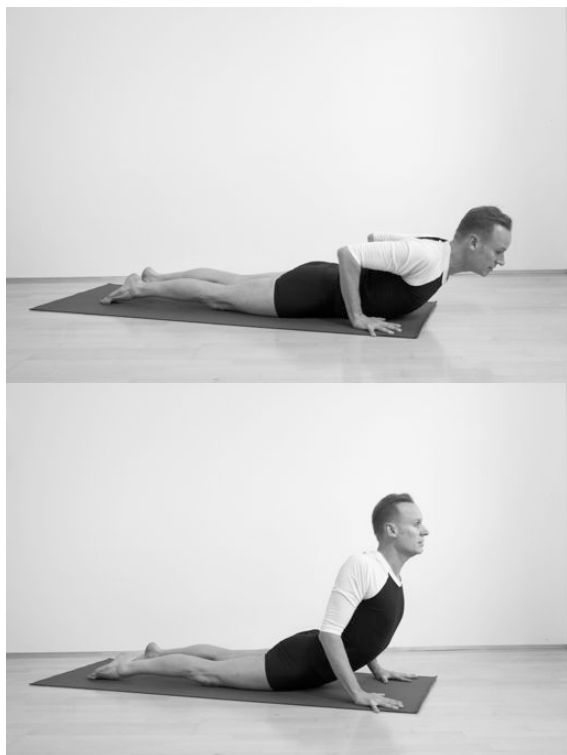
Lowering to the floor

- The key to shoulder alignment here is to move the pose forward until your shoulders are slightly ahead of your wrists and you are almost on your toenails. This transition should be smooth and quick.
- As you exhale lower your torso toward the floor with strong legs
- Your hands should be under your elbows, your upper arms parallel with the floor and your gaze forward



Cobra - Bujangasana

- Place your toenails on the floor and stretch through each leg until the 2nd toe of each foot is stretched straight back
- With your hands strong on the floor, inhale and lift your chest forward and up without lifting your pelvis off the floor.
- Stretch both legs back as you press your hands down and take your throat back and gaze up





Down Dog – 5 breaths

- From Cobra pose move back on an exhale to downward dog.
- This time take five long breaths

To complete the Sun Salutation

- Step forward on an inhale to ½ forward fold
- Exhale and forward fold more deeply
- Inhale, stand up and raise your arms overhead
- Exhale and return to standing with arms to the side.

You can repeat Sun Salutation several times to warm and open the body.



Pigeon - Rajakapotasana (forward bend variation)

- From Downward Dog come to hands and knees
- Sweep your right leg forward so the knee is wider than your right hip and the outer shin is on the ground in front of you (angle can vary) keep your right foot engaged and the ankle firm
- Tuck your left toes under and stretch the left leg straight
- Come down to your forearms, lean forward and stretch the back leg even more
- With the front ankle strong, lower your pelvis toward the floor by wrapping your right outer hip downward as you draw your tailbone toward your back heel.
- Place your hands on the floor and press back to Downward Dog. Perform side two.



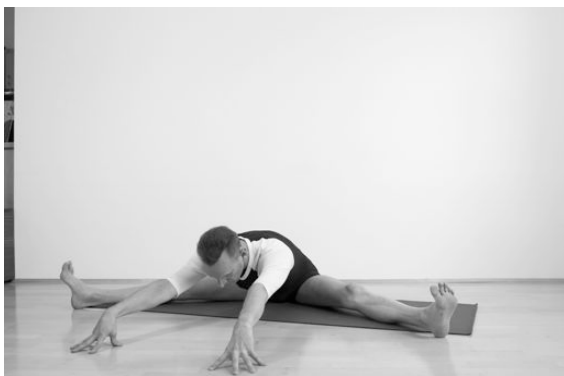
Pigeon - Rajakapotasana (back bend variation)

- From Downward Dog come to hands and knees
- Sweep your right leg forward so the knee is wider than your right hip and the outer shin is on the ground in front of you (angle can vary) keep your right foot engaged and the ankle firm
- Tuck your left toes under and stretch the left leg straight
- Place your fingertips on the mat beside you and with bent elbows, draw your shoulders back to create a backbend
- Take the throat back and then the gaze upward as you stretch through your back leg



Wide leg seated – Upavista Konasana

- Sit down on the floor and spread your legs wide
- Align your legs so your knees and 2nd toes are pointing to the sky
- Place your fingertips behind your or in front of you for support
- Press your heels down, lift your heart up and draw your shoulders onto your back
- Move forward into the pose with strong legs





One leg forward bend - Janu Sirsasana

- From wide leg seated position draw your right heel in so it presses against your right inner thigh and the sole of the foot is on your left leg
- Place your fingertips on the ground and extend your spine
- Rotate your torso over your left leg
- Exhale to stretch over the leg, taking the left foot in your right hand
- Maintain a strong connection through the base of the pose as you elongate and twist





Staff - Dandasana

- Seated on the ground, stretch your legs out in front of you with the inner ankles close, or touching
- Lean back if necessary to place both palms strongly on the ground
- Press your big toe mounds forward and draw the pinky toes toward your outer knees
- Firm your legs and draw your kneecaps toward your hips
- Lift your heart, breath deeply



Paschimottanasana

- With fingertips on the ground extend your spine long
- Keep length in your spine as you move forward over your legs
- Press your heels down to keep the legs strong and breath deeply
- Gaze to the toes to keep the mind more still





Backbend Prep

- Seated on the ground, stretch your legs out in front of you with the inner ankles close, or touching
- Lean back to place both palms strongly on the ground
- Press your big toe mounds forward and draw the pinky toes toward your outer knees
- Firm your legs and draw your kneecaps toward your hips
- Lift your heart, breath deeply



Purvottanasana

- From backbend prep press your big toe mounds forward and lift your pelvis off the ground
- Stretch your heart towards the sky and back toward the rear of your mat
- Keep the inner ankles pressing against each other
- Draw your shoulders back and maintain length in your neck as you look back



Modified bridge 1 - Setu bandasana

- Draw your heels close to your buttocks while sitting and place them hips distance apart
- Recline on to your back, stretch your arms beside you and bend your elbows, palms facing each other
- Press the back of your head, your elbows and your feet into the ground until a curve appears in your back
- Breathe into your chest, keep the natural curve in the back of your neck and draw your tailbone towards your heels until you feel your belly engage toward your spine



Modified bridge 2 - Setu bandasana

- Press the back of your head, your elbows and your feet into the ground until a curve appears in your back
- Breathe into your chest, keep the natural curve in the back of your neck and draw your tailbone toward your heels
- Lift your pelvis off the ground, and as you do keep your gaze toward the sky and a natural curve in the back of your neck



Modified bridge 3 - Setu bandasana

- From Modified bridge 2, place your hands under your pelvis, fingers wrapping your hips
- Hold your hip bones and wrap them forward (upward) and then slightly toward one another to open the back of your pelvis and spine
- Draw your tailbone toward your knees and lift your chest toward your chin with the back of your head strong on the ground



Shoulderstand variation 1 and 2 Sarvangasana

- From modified bridge 3, lift one leg toward the sky
- Press the foot on the ground strongly to the earth
- Keep your hips square by wrapping your bottom leg inner thigh toward the ground
- Hold this pose for a longer duration to feel the calming and nurturing effects of the inversion
- Lift both legs for a deeper inversion





Shoulderstand - Sarvangasana

- For the full inversion, walk your hands up your back toward your head and bring your torso more vertical
- Keep your head strong against the floor. You can also use a thick blanket under your shoulders for a mechanical advantage - it will make holding the pose for a longer duration easier
- Hold full shoulderstand for at least 2 minutes to gain the benefits of the inversion

Contraindications for inverted postures include conditions placing pressure on the eyes, diabetes, retinal damage, high blood pressure and for women, menstrual cycle. If in any doubt please consult your health provider.

Bound Angle – Baddha Konasana

- From a seated position bend your knees and place the soles of your feet together
- Make your feet strong and place your hands on your ankles
- Pull your heels toward your pelvis and lift your spine
- From your pelvis, stretch through your knees
- Fold forward with a long spine





1/2 lord of fishes - Ardha Matsyendrasana

- From Dandasana, cross your right leg over your left with the sole of your right foot just outside your left knee
- Wrap your left arm around your bent right knee and place your right fingertips on the mat behind you
- As you pull your right leg to the left, turn your torso to the right
- Keep the spine long by pressing down with your right hand



One leg crossed over fold - $\frac{1}{4}$ Gomukasana

- With legs in front of you when seated, cross your right knee over your left and draw your right heel toward your left leg
- Press down through your right heel, elongate your spine and fold forward
- Do both sides



Savasana

- Recline on your mat, take your legs a little wider than your hips, your arms wider than your shoulders
- Turn your palms upward by rotating your upper arms outward
- Take a deep inhale and let the exhale go as you surrender into the pose
- Relax for at least 3 minutes

Meditation

Sitting quietly can be done in many ways, and is actually the default state of being of a non-agitated mind. You can sit on a chair or on the floor. If you are new to meditation, begin simply by setting a timer for 2 or 3 minutes. Don't apply a technique yet, just sit. You may find your mind moving seemingly more quickly than it normally does. This is probably because you are now not moving and you can see what is happening. You could breath smoothly, or feel the space at the end of each breath. Your meditation should be enjoyable.



A Key to Relationship

We can't deny relationship, no matter how difficult it can sometimes be. Your heart is in relationship with your respiration, your breath in relationship with your circulation. Given space and the absence of mental fiddling, the breath and heart naturally relate. Made conscious, this inward way of relating can then be offered to another. The written and spoken word can among other things qualify, quantify and create meaning. It can also reduce something felt, expansive and beyond words to a symbol - a facsimile of experience.

Sit comfortably, close your eyes and develop a fluid nasal breath. Lift the soft palate into a gentle pre-yawn shape so the nasal inhale carries the sound of the ocean. Exhale also through the nose and keep the soft palate lifted, mouth closed. The inhale is the receptive, universal nurturing quality which moves toward life. The exhale is the more individual expression of life, moving toward dissolution. The space between breaths allows a moment of space and absence of thought. Practice for a couple of minutes, and lean gently toward a balance of inhale and exhale, and no rush in the space between breaths.

Now sit back to back with the one you want to relate to more naturally, after they have practiced the breath on their own. With backs

touching, lean so that you are both supporting and receiving support. Don't support so much that you feel you are doing all the work, and don't lean too hard either. Begin your breath individually. Feel the warmth and movement of life in your partner. Your breath and weight may synchronize and balance, or it may not. If you try to adjust your natural breath to match your partners, this compromise will move you away from your natural rhythm. If they feel you trying to match their breath they may feel self-conscious and want to do the same. This "management" of the breath can then become so complicated it is no longer fun, or natural.

This practice is both a metaphor for all parts of relationship and a natural practice of intimacy. You may have a natural rhythm with some people, and not with others. It has been my experience that trying to manage the breath doesn't create ease. What does work is breathing naturally, without compromise. Natural relationship flowers from there.

About the author:

Daniel Clement lives on Texada Island in British Columbia Canada, near the ocean in an old house with his interesting dog. He spends his time at home playing guitar, chopping wood, doing yoga and writing. Daniel travels and offers workshops, trainings and lectures on yoga practice, finding your gift and cultivating appreciation.

An audio version of this book as well as a led version of the hatha yoga practice is available.

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