

Reprogramming The Traumatized Brain and Body Through Yoga

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Trauma- A deeply distressing disturbing experience. Everybody carries some degree of trauma.

PTSD-We can identify the cause if a trigger.

Complex PTSD may mean that we are toned to what are triggers are as we have normalized them in some way.

We relate to our body and mind differently, yet both are always sending us signals for healing.

We tend to shame our emotional signals while listening to our physical ones.

If the body endures a physical injury in some way you will feel that imprint for your whole life.

When the body endures and emotional injury we will also feel that imprint for the whole of our lives.

This is what we call a trigger- when the emotional response (reaction) does not match the stimulus.

The body and mind gets trapped against defending itself against a threat that belongs in the past.

Examples: Stories of triggers, the ticking clock, the bamboo plant.

It is our responsibility as healers to be mindful (observant), paying close attention to nonverbal cues.

The traumatized client:

- **stiff/tight**
- **flat affect-tell their story as if it has happened to someone else**
- **Known as dissociation-a defense mechanism of essentially numbing and avoiding to avoid feelings of being hijacked**
- **hypervigilance- hyperactive startle reflex**
- **the 100 yard stare or darting eyes**
They are trapped in the sympathetic nervous system of fight or flight

The brain has a very important job! ENSURE OUR SURVIVAL!!!

Our brain is what generates basic signals such as food, rest, shelter, socialization, protection etc. (basic needs) The brain is developed from the bottom up.

The youngest part of our brain is the prefrontal cortex (only 30% of the brain)- our cognitive/ rational system that measures consequences i.e.:adolescents (ends at 25 y/o)

The traumatized brain gets hijacked!

The amygdala (the smoke detector of the brain)- is our internal alarm which alerts us danger becomes hyper-aroused.

False alarms are everywhere....Again-TRIGGERS! People can begin to present as paranoid.

***In brain scans there is evidence of enlarged amygdala in traumatized people such as holocaust survivors.**

We Must Comprehend That Trauma Is NOT All In “The Mind” (meaning the cognitive process)

Trauma becomes a part of our biology, living inside the physical body and nervous system.

Psychosomatic illnesses are very common in traumatized people....Prolonged states of living in fight or flight (saturated in adrenaline and cortisol) deplete us!!!

We know this through our own muscle tension at the end of a stressful day...We carry our tension in our bodies, headaches, fatigue, irritability, aching etc.

Trauma gets imprinted on the physical body which is why mental health professionals ask about health conditions on intakes.

Common Psychosomatic Illnesses.....

Insomnia

digestive problems

poor appetite and over eating

IBS

Autoimmune diseases

Pelvic floor issues especially in sexual trauma

These illnesses are REAL! Avoid the stigma! THE BIGGEST TRIGGER

FOR TRAUMATIZED

PEOPLE.....STILLNESS!!!!!!

We have the opportunity to help traumatized people reprogram the brain and body! YAY!!!!!!

Side Note: This is true, we hold a lot of power, do not let people worship you, their recovery is ultimately their own, we are merely shining the light on a path, if they take it...it is theirs! Remind them of their power!

Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk. Psychiatrist in Massachusetts- Trauma Specialist utilizing embodiment techniques. Book-The Body Keeps The Score.

Yoga is where we have the life changing opportunity to learn what the physical and emotional body is telling us.

We are a numbed out culture in large. Highly addicted

- **food**
- **social media**
- **drugs**
- **alcohol**
- **shopping**

- porn
- exercising (orthorexia to be enlisted in next DSM)
- **BUSY!!**

By helping our students learn how to inhabit the body we teach them how to begin to emotionally regulate. This can change the reactive/impulsive emotional reaction to become a mindful emotional response. This does not mean that the original emotional reaction doesn't happen, it simply means that we learn to be aware of it and not get hijacked by it.

**le-Systematic Desensitization now called Exposure Therapy
Response- Used for phobia treatment**

We all have a particular passion and message to deliver and we as instructors need to be mindful and offer our students options, never assuming that one modality fits everyone as therapeutic yoga instructors.

We need to be conscious of the unconscious emotional injuries stored in the body.

Embodiment work is powerful! Unpleasant sensory surfaces have the opportunity to surface and we are guiding our students through them in teaching them how to listen and regulate their response.

Exercise:

Close eyes....Place your hands where you viscerally feel

Joy; Fear; Love, Excitement, Sadness, Anxiety, Worry....can you breathe into it and welcome it as a friend with an important message? What We Do As Instructors.

*** What we don't do! Yoga is NOT a cure all, we need to encourage people to be open to all modalities of wellness including psychotropic medication. We would never tell someone with serious mental illness that yoga will cure their schizophrenia. Nor should we assume yoga will cure anxiety, depression, addiction. Mental illness is often a genetic issue.**

***Telling our students that happiness is a choice is deeply dangerous...it is a spiritual bypass which avoids dark realities.**

Options, Options, Options!

- Dharma Talks- Be mindful (aware) of the energy you have. Not everyday is going to be inspiring, you are human too. Be honest with yourself and with what you have to offer your students on the day to day in regards to setting an intention for your class. Remember- there is a power differential while teaching and our students may be impressionable.**
- Ask and Encourage- give options for eyes closed or open, if open a soft focal point. When you can, ask a student privately before class about injuries. Take a blind census by asking them to close their eyes for things like hands on assists and incense (some are very sensitive)**

- **Remind-You are there for them**
- **Language- Notice YOUR vs Notice THE-Your is permission to tune into their practice!**
- **Breath-Some people experience what is known as breath starvation, pulmonary issues. Counting the breath could be triggering, give an option in pranayama to feel the sensation of the breath in regards to where their bodies move with the breath and the temperature of the inhale and exhale. Encouraging natural breath when needed.**
- **Hands-Up or down, Up can feel more vulnerable and down can feel more grounding during seated practices....Stillness Alert!**
- **Cues- For those who do not want hands on adjustments, try mirroring them or asking them to use their own hands.**
- **Restorative-Stillness Alert....Give them blankets to use to cover**

especially pelvic bowl.

- **Mediation- give guidance and then give them silent time to sit.**

MAYBE EXPLORE THE OPTION OF CLOSING CLASS WITH HONORING THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

Everyone who comes to yoga is looking for healing. It is our responsibility to be compassionate to not only the physical injuries but also the emotional injuries that we may not be able to see.

We as yoga instructors ARE NOT PSYCHOTHERAPISTS. It is vital that you protect your emotional energy. When you experience a student in distress try not become their outlet, this could empty the cup from which you pour from.

We also have the opportunity to help students grow but no enabling disrespectful or disruptive behavior. It is absolutely healthy for a teacher to address a disruptive student in a assertive venom less manor. If they do not come back, that is also ok. Please try to release the idea that you did something wrong by asking a disruptive student to be compassionate for the greater good.