

## Life For Life

“Lying prone on a bobbing wooden plank, Ari Afrizal looked left and saw the fiery red sun dipping into the watery horizon. Weakly, he turned his face the other way and saw a pearly white full moon rising in the east. All around him, the sea looked like it was sprinkled with chopped leaves of gold, shimmering in the sun’s glow.” AP

In all his life as a carpenter on the Sumatran shores, Ari had never beheld a sight as extraordinary as this. According to him, it was a sign that God had heard his call for help. In the face of brutal tragedy that ripped him from a more familiar world, and thrust him into the deep ocean of uncontrollable force, it appears this natural marvel afforded him a glimpse into the ‘unstruck’ essence of his own true nature.

His immersion or baptism in ‘lila’, the cosmic play is no doubt the difference that marks him amidst many other tsunami survivors unable to transform the raw emotions that belabor each breath, into the pure energy that underlies each conscious moment.

Like the splitting of an atom, a tremendous release of quantifiable energy is tangible at the deathbed, the funeral pyre, or casket. Life gives life for life and the living witness has an opportunity to partake in and be self-empowered by the cyclic offering of essence into essence.

The tantrik tradition of hatha yoga teaches us to expand our awareness beyond the confines of conditioned thought and to experience - whilst living in a body - the liberation possible without one!

Within this tradition, death and grief rituals support a healthy phase of acceptance and integration. Acceptance is to realize our transient bodies as elemental containers of energy, crystallized or transcended by varying degrees of consciousness. Integration means continually choosing moment-to-moment experience of “what is” even if that experience is unimaginable devastation.

The Sanskrit word for health is Swasta, Being with Self, Flowing Presence. It implies operating at one’s true capacity with the absence of blockage in the muscular, mental, emotional and bioelectric body.

The primary role of a teacher versed in the key principles of yoga as a therapeutic modality, is to locate and facilitate the removal of obstacles to the body’s own inherent process of healing. Yoga develops awareness of these self-healing mechanisms that are

designed and powered by Prakriti, or Nature herself.

Emotional tension, most notably grief is a reactionary recoil, a “tightening, twisting away from the situation you find yourself in.” The antidote is to experience all arising emotions as a spontaneous stream of energy, without attaching to them in an attempt to grasp what is, by nature a transparent process and not a fixed state.

By identifying yourself with the emotional state of disconnection, “I am unworthy” “We are being punished” “It’s hopeless” rather than maintaining flowing presence, the natural course of energy is obstructed. The body’s subtle channels are damaged and the vital life force ferried within them is diverted from the areas of need.

## The Practice

In most cases of morbid grief and depression, a cold rigidity tends to creep into the physical structures that support the head and provide housing for the heart and lungs. Numbness pervades the lower regions. The teacher might discern typically tense areas: curled fingers and toes, collapsed chest, rounded shoulders, irregular, thoracic breathing, deep sighs, dull eyes and complexion.

Everyone responds uniquely to emotional trauma. An experienced yoga and ayurvedic practitioner will modify a practice according to one’s innate constitution, the imbalance of gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) and the tattvas (earth, water, fire, air, space). But even without specific training in ayurveda, a teacher can learn to address the nature of balance in terms of the five elements, a universal language. For instance, someone with an earth element disturbance presents contracted, heavy, gloom and doom. The water disturbance engenders both neediness and withdrawal. The fire disturbance generates cold-hearted aggression. Both air and space disturbances might snuff out the will to focus, generating fantasy instead of reality.

Incorporating these basic principles, yoga practices are presented to facilitate the natural expression and transformation of emotions like grief and depression. In this case, the sequence of techniques is an energetic progression from gross to subtle.

Generally, this remedial practice includes warming postures that stimulate and purify the main nadis, or energy channels that run along the front, back and sides of the body. These practices would draw on proven techniques that balance the sympathetic (solar, pingala) and parasympathetic (lunar, ida) nervous system; squeeze out deposits of Vata (gases) lactic acids, metabolic wastes and toxins; stimulate respiratory, circulatory, digestive and excretory systems; cultivate and direct vital prana into storehouses of

tension.

Begin the practice with Pavanmuktasana Part 1: (joint freeing series as taught by Swami Satyananda Saraswati). Introduce Surya and Bhoomi Namaskar (salutations to sun and earth), once the body and mind warm up.

Specifically the practice will sequence asanas that direct special attention and pressure to the marma or acupressure points that relieve holding of grief, anxiety, stress and depression, such as: the center and lower minor mound of the palms, the pit of the throat and depression between hyoid and Adam's apple, center of chin dimple, trapezius line, lateral to C7 spinous, upper edge of scapula, T12 renal angle.

Asanas:

Back-bending asanas: bhujangasana (cobra), shalabhasana (classical locust, chin on ground), ushtrasana (camel)

Seated and Forward bends: shashankasana (hare), Simhasana (lion), classical paschimottanasana (flexed spine, thumbs to knees), parivritti janushirshasana (spiraled head to knee)

Introversions: halasana (plough), sarvangasana (shoulder stand), matsyasana (fish), yogamudrasana (lotus bud), supine twists (wring out lingering tension, move subtle energy upwards)

Shavasana (total relaxation)

Pranayama:

Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril) with extended exhalation, Surya Bhedana (right nostril)

Mantras: (illumination)

Gayatri mantra, ram, hrim, aum namaha shivaya

Mudras (energy seals):

Vipareeta Karani (balances flow of prana in ida and pingala channels)

Pashinee Mudra (quiets nervous system)

Shambhavi (calms mind, relieving emotional stress)

Lifestyle:

Daily routine of self massage (abhyanga means fearless body, snehana means touch of love) with warm Mahanarayan oil (add a few drops of musk or rose)

Karma yoga

Immersion in the beauty of nature