

THE YOGA & PSYCHE
METHOD TOOLBOX

May the heat of suffering become the fire of love.¹

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Practice 1: Learning to Feel Emotion in the Body

We can experience all emotion as sensation in the body, and learning to do so is often a turning point in one’s inner healing. I’m including a list of “feeling” words for bodily sensations below; this list was created by the Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute.²

When you read these words out loud for clients or students, suggest that they gently scan their body to note the presence and location of these feelings. Simply identifying the sensations of emotions in the body—and bringing compassionate awareness to them—immediately enables us to process, heal, and integrate emotions on a somatic level. These words can also be used as suggestions and options to support clients to learn to identify the sensations they experience in their body as they process emotional material. In no particular order, these possible bodily sensations include:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| Hot/warm | Cold |
| Slow | Fast |
| Loose | Stuck |
| Relaxing | Empty |
| Tingly | Floating |
| Tight | Calm |
| Shaky | Flowing |
| Constricted | Front/back |
| Moving Up/Down | Dizzy |
| Numb | Buzzing |
| Opening | Itching |
| Burning | Tension |
| Lightness | |

The questions “How do you feel?” and “Where do you feel what you feel in your body?” may seem novel and sometimes unsettling to people who find it difficult to detect or describe how they feel at any given time. People might be able to identify particularly strong emotions such as sorrow, heartbreak, or rage; they may even be able to connect these to their heart or gut. However, a surprising number of people have difficulty identifying even the most potent of feelings, let alone the vast array of emotions that lie along the spectrum of pleasure and pain. It can be a life-changing revelation to discover that we experience *all* emotion as sensation in the body and subsequently to learn to process emotions through somatic awareness. Thomas Hanna described somatics as referring to “the body as perceived from within the first-person perception . . . the human being as experienced by himself [or herself] from the inside.”³ For some people, this reentry into the body is felt as a spiritual experience and process.

With safety and skill, we can learn to enter the body slowly, lovingly, and progressively—gently turning toward emotions and even traumatic experiences that we have feared or avoided feeling our whole lives, and transforming them into authentic gifts. We discern for ourselves that we can experience even powerful emotions as sensations in the body that are always moving and changing. Some of these may feel unpleasant or uncomfortable, especially at first. However, as we become more familiar with the practice and meet our sensations with awareness and compassion, they typically transform into something else. Noticing this, we gain the courage and curiosity to face our emotions, feel them in our bodies, and witness how tensions, patterns, memories, and emotions gradually metabolize and release.

Here’s a loose outline for the practice:

1. To begin, take a few slow, deep, and natural (that is, not forced) breaths. If you feel any tensions in your body, try to release them.
2. Next, bring your awareness to everything in your body below your neck, scanning slowly to sense what you are feeling in the various areas of your body.

3. As you continue to breathe and pay attention to different areas of your body that hold tension, emotion, memories, and images, use your breath and movement to release them. If you are engaging this practice while in asana, allow your body to gently adjust your posture in order to unwind and process emotion in any way it naturally wants to. Simply bringing compassionate attention and breath to emotions as they live inside the body will enable them to change and gently unwind, just as the body does during asana. In addition to yoga practice, this is a process you can integrate into talk therapy, self-inquiry, or dyad practice.

4. You can also explore the following questions when engaging in this practice:
 - What do you feel in your body?
 - Where do you feel the emotion?
 - What else do you notice as you feel that sensation?
 - How would you describe its shape, size, or color?
 - Does the feeling spread?
 - What is its temperature and texture?
 - What are the images or memories that come with it?
 - Where are the borders and boundaries of the sensation, and where do you stop feeling it? (For example: top, bottom, front, back.)
 - Where does the sensation change into something else?
 - How would you describe these boundaries of sensation?
 - Does it stay the same or change as you pay attention to it?
 - When you stay with what you are feeling, what happens next?

These simple questions yield deeper and more nuanced responses from within ourselves when practiced over time. They can also transform the way we process our emotions on a daily basis. When I refer to *processing* trauma and emotion, I hope it's clear that I don't mean that they go away forever. They are part and parcel of life itself. *Processing* in this context means that we move through our feelings and experiences more quickly, with more ease, and with far less fear. When we turn toward emotions and memories and connect them with bodily sensations, we viscerally come to understand that remembering past events, trauma, and painful memories does not necessarily need to be overwhelming. We can actually find the experience to be freeing and healing.

As we explore this practice further, we discover that emotions are not simply sensations—they are comprised of continually moving, changing, and layered sensate experiences. For example, we might initially connect feelings of anger to tightness in the belly, but further exploration reveals that our belly entails multiple layers and dimensions—a front and back, sides, and perhaps a sense of blurriness as to where it ends and other parts of the body begin. As we explore the details of our sensations, we might also discover that forgotten memories, new emotions, or novel visions and insights appear. What we perceive as *inside* and *outside* the body may begin to change or merge. Accordingly, our connection to the natural world may also change.

As we learn to move our awareness throughout the body, we might be surprised to find areas that are more difficult to feel—even numb—whereas other areas offer more sensation and movement. Perhaps some are even blissful. Sometimes areas of our body that contain intense pain also offer deep pleasure. As we continue to explore emotion as sensation, new levels of long-held tension and trauma unwind and release from within, and we are progressively liberated at deeper levels of psychological experience and somatic tension.

Although we may be accustomed to feeling certain emotions in specific areas of the body (sadness in the heart, anger in the belly), it's best not to assume that we will perceive a given emotion in the same place or way as we did previously—or even as others might commonly

experience it. Trauma and the emotional life of the body are complex, layered, and ever changing. We gain more benefit by exploring emotion in the body freshly each time we turn toward it, allowing ourselves to gain the greatest amount of information and to process our experience more efficiently. We begin to experience more confidence, joy, self-esteem, and pleasure in our bodies as pain and trauma release. We also learn to move through life with the empowered awareness that we are actually capable of processing emotions in our bodies.

Practice 2: Tracking Sensation in the Body (and in Others' Bodies)

We pay close attention to sensations as they move through the body, allowing them to do so and noting any images, memories, and emotions that arise with them. As we track ourselves in this way, we discover that sensations can move, metabolize, and transform rather quickly when we bring loving, compassionate, and nonjudgmental awareness to them. We find ourselves getting stuck in our lives less often because we can process emotion in our bodies, and when we do get stuck, we remember that tracking the sensations of stuckness in the body allows us to get unstuck more quickly.

Once we are able to track sensations in our own bodies, we can begin to track the sensations of others. Therapists and teachers can use this powerful tool to empathize with others at a somatic level while maintaining boundaries and not taking on the pain of others in an unhealthy way. Here's an outline to the practice of attending to the physical sensations of others:

1. Drop your awareness into your body and scan the area beneath your neck. Bring your arms, legs, belly, heart, and the rest of your body into awareness.
2. Choose to set your personal experience to the side for now and bring your attention to the person in front of you (client, student, dyad partner, etc.).

3. Note the person's posture, the patterns of their breathing, gestures, or any other somatic sensations that are visible, and sense what these might feel like in your own body.
4. As you guide the person toward exploring emotion as sensation in their body, feel your own body in the noted areas and allow yourself to taste or sense what they are experiencing. Gently feel into those same sensations, breathing patterns, gestures, or postures in your own body. (You can work with not getting overwhelmed or taking on your clients' feelings by using the practice of "titration" later in this chapter.)
5. Watch for subtle signs of movement, holding, or release. Invite the person to articulate what they are perceiving.
6. As they articulate the experience, visualize whatever images they report and continue to allow yourself to feel their sensations in your own body.
7. As the person shifts in their body, follow the movement in your own body.
8. Always support the client by ending a session in a somatically and emotionally grounded place (see the next section on resourcing). Gently guide the client back to this reference in their bodies, and also allow yourself to return to a centered place in your own body.

As therapists, we benefit from this practice by learning to put our own experience aside and allowing ourselves to somatically feel another person's experience, and we practice doing so in a way that provides safe and healthy boundaries while simultaneously expressing our care. When we feel others in this way, it expands our capacity for empathy. The client or yoga student experiences this viscerally, thereby receiving tremendous support. For even short periods of time, they feel in their

body that someone else holds their experience with them and that they are not alone with it. In tracking others' emotions as sensations in our own body, and by discovering a way to feel deeply with the other person without getting overwhelmed, we discover that we as human beings share a number of common emotions. In this way, all of us feel less alone and more connected with others, reminded that we all have a vulnerable and profound core in common.

Practice 3: Resourcing

Even though this is a straightforward practice, people regularly tell me that it's the most powerful somatic tool they've learned to use. In short, resourcing teaches us to consciously allow or invoke pleasure, safety, wholeness, fullness, sensuality, sexuality, joy, and well-being in the body. For those who have experienced and suffered intense trauma, resourcing often restores a sense of basic okayness that they may have lost. I've found that learning to establish pleasure and safety in the body is often more healing than what we gain by revisiting trauma. When we learn to create a climate of inner safety, the petals of our psyche organically unfold one by one. Old wounds dissipate more easily in an inner climate of increasing pleasure and self-love. Our psyche just needs small gestures of consistent nourishing and safe spaces in which to unfold.

Everyone possesses resources. Resources take the form of anything (or anyone) that supports and nurtures a sense of physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual well-being. Resources can be internal, external, or both. When trauma occurs, instinctive resources for protection and self-defense can become overwhelmed. Developing inner resources can help balance the nervous system and serve as a source of strength and support; it can also provide us with a sense of calm and wholeness, even in the face of uncertainty and difficulty.

Psychology, trauma-healing methods, and somatics have developed powerful tools for resourcing. Yoga offers an additional wellspring, including asanas, sequences, visualizations, breath practices, mantras, and community in addition to the perspectives offered by the

philosophical aspects of yoga. Learning to utilize resources through various means empowers us to become emotionally flexible and capable of adjusting to life's intensities with more ease and grace. Remember that prana follows attention. Resourcing allows us to learn to be present with experiences such as spaciousness, wholeness, and the goodness in our lives, and it helps us enjoy them. When we have been traumatized, we often have to learn to tolerate pleasure in small doses, for even though we may long for joy, the feel of it can prove strange and unusual. It takes practice to trust that it is safe to allow ourselves to feel pleasure, wholeness, and goodness in our bodies. Here are five ways to explore resourcing for yourself and others:

1. **Resourcing through the Body** You can engage this type of resourcing in seated meditation practice or during psychological inquiry in dyads or with a therapist. Begin by taking a few slow, deep breaths, and relax any surface tension when you exhale. As you bring awareness to your body at the emotional/psychological level of sensations, notice which areas feel more active and energized and in which places you feel less present, or even numb. Ask questions to help you or others explore places of wellness and pleasure in your body. Try these:
 - Can you find any sense (small or large) of wellness, wholeness, safety, pleasure, or spaciousness anywhere in your body? If so, where is it?
 - What do the front, back, sides, and boundaries of that pleasure (or spaciousness, wholeness, etc.) feel like?
 - What are the colors, associated images, or memories that it brings with it?
 - How would you describe its temperature? Is it warm or cold?
 - As you stay with the pleasure (or spaciousness, wholeness, etc.), does it stay the same or change?

Begin to explore pleasure by gently extending and exploring these sensations, really taking the time to discover what positive emotion and enjoyment feel like at the level of sensation. Acknowledge to yourself and students or clients that it can take some time—and significant patience—for many to learn to feel a sense of pleasure and wholeness in our bodies, particularly if we were never taught or modeled how to experience such things or if we have been traumatized.

2. **Resourcing through Nature Imagery** In this form of resourcing, we, a partner, or client come up with an image from nature that inspires nourishment, pleasure, safety, relaxation, and well-being. This can take the form of a place we've been to—perhaps a special beach or by a favorite tree—or it can be entirely imagined. As this image comes to mind, explore it with questions similar to those in the list above (e.g., “What is the temperature?” and “Are you alone or with others?” and “What textures surround you?”). While feeling into your body, place awareness on the colors, setting, temperature, wind, sun, and quality of the air in this beautiful place.

Next, hold that nature image in your mind as you drop awareness into your body—anywhere beneath your neck, lightly scanning your body to notice areas of heightened awareness or numbness. Allow the nature image to transpose itself onto your body, and investigate how you can experience that superimposition as sensation in your body. Following this practice is like engaging asanas with our emotions, and just like physical asanas, we learn and refine it through practice. Some people report being able to calm their nervous system easily, even when they first engage in this practice, whereas others require more patience.

For those who don't feel pleasure or wholeness when they sense into their bodies, invoking nature imagery serves as an accessible way to begin to do so. Because we encounter the imagery as something neutral, we more readily connect

with the psychological safety and space needed to allow more pleasure and wholeness into our experience. And as we gently and repeatedly bring our awareness back to the nurturing nature image as the mind wanders, we learn to stay with a sense of well-being and allow that experience to be sustained for longer periods of time. With repeated practice, we gradually remodel our nervous system toward well-being and wholeness.

A final note on this practice: It's important that the practitioner not use a place in nature they escaped to as a child. A nature image of this type often carries with it the memory of the trauma that brought the person to seek it out in the first place, so using the same location is not as effective when it comes to developing new structures for safety and pleasure within our bodies. Additionally, people raised in cities for most of their lives may not associate nature imagery with nourishment and safety—they might even feel scared or intimidated by nature. These people will experience better results by relying on the other approaches to resourcing.

3. **Resourcing through Yogic Imagery** Following the previous examples of resourcing, begin by visualizing an image of a yogic deity or archetype that you feel a connection to. If you are not familiar with specific deities, you can allow an image of a benevolent god or goddess to emerge in your awareness. As with nature resourcing, allow the image to be superimposed onto your own body, or if that is difficult, allow your awareness to move between the image and your own body. Begin to notice how the deity, or what it inspires, is felt as sensation and resourcefulness in your own body and allow the experience to expand and deepen using the previous inquiry questions to further explore the changing images, emotions, sensations, and insights as they emerge.

The Hindu pantheon abounds with imagery invoking the infinite qualities and aspects of the Divine. Yogic imagery speaks directly to the challenges and archetypes we face in life

and offers us intricate maps along our journey to well-being. By resourcing these images, we can access a more universal sense of strength, faith, perseverance, beauty, and abundance. Although the wrathful deities found in Hindu and Buddhist iconography—for example Kali, Shiva, and the various forms of Mahakala—are ultimately beneficent, I recommend using imagery of kind, beautiful, and compassionate deities such as Lakshmi, Tara, Kuan Yin, or some version of the Earth Mother. People who aren't as familiar with these deities can use any benevolent image that comes to mind, even if it doesn't come with a specific name or familiar identity.

Sometimes learning this practice invokes mantras and prayers from traditions other than yoga. Spiritual practices that you were raised with or encountered throughout your life can offer new and surprisingly powerful resources. For example, a person might become reacquainted with, or newly encounter, the Hebrew Shema chant, the tradition of chanting *Allah*, or speaking a line from a Christian prayer. When chanting aloud or reciting these words internally, we can bring our awareness to the emotional and somatic experience of our body and allow the sacred syllables and meanings to provide resourcing and to soften areas of holding and tension.

Resourcing through mystical imagery allows the possibility of new layers of insight, experience, and somatic integration to occur. And when we combine esoteric yogic practices with this type of resourcing, the results can be both psychological and spiritual.

4. **Resourcing through Asana** To begin this physical type of resourcing, assume a nurturing and nondemanding yoga posture. Sink into the pose and use any props available to support more ease and comfort. Explore how you can become even more comfortable—and perhaps 5 percent kinder—toward yourself while in the pose, and see what you can release as you bring awareness to your body in this asana.

Check in with the tone of voice you use to speak to yourself. Turn toward yourself gently, asking how you are doing and letting your deep psyche know that you are here for yourself. Simply making the voice we address ourselves with in and out of yoga class more compassionate and loving can act as a tremendous resource.

If practicing in a dyad, one person can offer their hands to help the other adjust, soften, and feel more fully into the pose. Each partner takes a turn and learns to feel, request, and receive touch and safe physical support in the process of their own unwinding. Keep in mind that when we delve into the practices of titration and pendulation (explained next), this resourced asana becomes the place from which we enter and come out of somatic practice. Accordingly, explore these asanas extensively to discover their capacity to provide pleasure and support.

It's important to recognize that the asana one person considers a resource will not be so for someone else. In fact, one person's resource may be another's doorway into suffering, and this association can change for each of us from day to day. This is why we should allow people to identify their own resources through asana rather than transposing a series of poses designed to address everyone's proclivities and needs. It's best to begin fresh with each practice and inquiry in order to see how the emotional life of the body feels on any given day.

5. **Resourcing through Sun Salutations** I once took a group of graduate students to study yoga in Varanasi, India. Every morning, we formed a silent procession to an outside platform just above the banks of the Ganges where it flowed through the city. As the sun rose, temple bells rang and thousands of people beneath us stood in the river or on its banks. They offered flowers and water, intoning the traditional Gayatri Mantra chanted at sunrise, high noon, and sunset. Additionally, they performed the series of

motions known as *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation). After that profound experience, I began to include the Gayatri Mantra, supplications, prayers, and offerings to the way I practice and teach Sun Salutations, rather than simply the series of powerful, but not prayerful, set of asanas that I had understood Sun Salutations to be until then. Doing so has opened up an entirely new dimension of sun practice that others and I have experienced as profoundly nourishing and potently healing. At times we perceived, and witnessed others experience, that our bodies are actually prayers and can be used as such. I have repeated variations of this practice with students over the years and integrated it with other somatic exercises—for example, offering up one's sense of self-hatred or self-negation to the sun. The combination regularly brings people into beautiful experiences of embodied awareness.

To try this out yourself, chant or listen to the Gayatri Mantra as you begin the Surya Namaskar sequence. Contemplate its meaning and feel the vibration of the sound in your body as a prayer of alignment for the upper, middle, and lower layers of your consciousness. Ask for support to become connected and balanced with the rhythms of your body, the earth, and the cosmos. As you bend down in the forward folds of Sun Salutation, you bow to the sun as the giver of life. When you raise your arms back up, you scoop up the sacred waters of the world and offer it with flowers (and all of your imperfections) to the sun as a gift with gratitude. You can also offer that which no longer serves you—that is, what you wish to let go of in your life—as well as prayer and gratitude. Continue to bow, open your heart to the sun and light, and contemplate the sun and its life-giving properties as you move through the motions of Surya Namaskar and the Gayatri Mantra. For many of us, practicing in this way brings about an acute sense of psychological safety, well-being, peace, gratitude, and tremendous energy. You can turn this practice into a

profound resource by using mantra, studying the practice more intensely, and continuing to explore the esoteric dimensions of Surya Namaskar.

Mantras—repeated words or phrases meant to invoke a divine name, universal principle, prayer, or intention—can serve as powerful inner resources. When I was engaged in intensive mantra practice as a young woman, I once found myself suddenly hydroplaning on a major highway near San Francisco at night. I watched as my car spun out of control toward the median, and an entire highway of traffic rushed straight at me. Having absolutely no control of the car, I remembered the mantra I had practiced with Yogi Ramsuratkumar in India and began to recite it. The next moment, the entire highway stopped, including my car and all others. I sat still in the rain, facing all of those vehicles stopped directly in front of me, with nobody harmed at all. I turned on my car, wheeled it around, and drove home. Although the near accident brought some shock and fear, the power of the mantra I had practiced to resource me was incredibly affirming, uplifting, and empowering. Similarly, I recommend the practice of kirtan as a potent form of yogic resourcing through mantra with the added benefit of community and the power of collective intention.

Practice 4: Titration

The word *titration* refers to the process of gradually applying a solution of a known concentration to a known volume of a different solution. In a yogic or somatic context, this means exploring a particular memory, wound, emotion, or contraction slowly, in small amounts, and for short periods of time by relying on an inner resource (for example, nature imagery or asana practice). We begin by invoking a sense of safety in the body through resourcing, and then we turn toward and titrate whatever it is we wish to explore. In titration we don't immediately feel into the center of a wound. Instead, we lightly touch its edge

or outermost layer, ease into the emotion or trauma gradually, and feel and integrate it progressively at a sustainable pace.

Titration helps us realize that we have a choice about the manner in and depth to which we enter emotional states. We soon discover that we can make considerable strides by taking small steps toward our wounds, our shadow side, and the interior places that scare us, and then we can return to our inner resource. In the scientific principle of titration, one concentration is slowly added to another until the reaction reaches neutralization. In this context, the possibility exists to neutralize and defuse our contractions by engaging them within the body in digestible bits, all while relying on the safety of resourcing. Here's a brief guide to practicing titration in therapy, counseling, or dyad practice:

- Begin with one of the resourcing methods described earlier in this chapter.
- You can do this exercise with open or closed eyes, but closing the eyes often helps people feel into their bodies. However, if closing your eyes brings about dissociation or distraction, it's best to keep them open.
- Choose something you would like to work with: a certain pain, a physical or emotional contraction, a concern, or any type of challenge that comes to mind.
- Feel into the top layer of emotions and sensations that accompany this challenge in the body. The top layer can mean the top 5 percent, 3 percent, or less. I've had clients who prefer to feel into as little as the top .005 percent, and this also works.
- Try to stay with this experience for thirty to sixty seconds, and know that you are free to back out and return to a resourced place any time you begin to feel overwhelmed. Note: If you tell yourself, or a client, that you will be staying with the emotion for only thirty to sixty seconds, be sure not to stay

there past that amount of time. Keeping within the stated time frame creates safety in our own psyche and that of our clients.

- If you're helping someone else with this practice, track their emotions and sensations in your own body as described above. Make sure that you don't become overwhelmed or shut down. Over time, your ability to support others in this way increases.

You can also explore titration in asana practice:

- Begin with an asana that provides a sense of resourcing.
- Now choose an asana to titrate that brings up resistance or some sort of physical or emotional challenge. However, don't pick a complex pose—you want to free up your awareness to the emotional aspect of your experience.
- Enter the pose as you normally might. Back out of the pose progressively to the degree that you can still access its physical and emotional imprint in a manageable way, beginning with 20 to 30 percent and even backing out as far as 90 percent.
- Now turn toward whatever sensations, emotions, memories, impressions, or images arise in your body. Feel and be with them for a short period of time—between fifteen and sixty seconds.
- Back out of this asana and return to the original resourced pose, or use some other resource.
- When applying titration to asana, you can also titrate between deeper and lesser intensity within the pose. For example, an ordinarily challenging pose can become resourced if titrated out of to a significant extent.
- If desired, repeat the above sequence between three and five times.

As you become familiar with using titration in asana, you discover that you can enter poses to greater or lesser degrees depending on the level of the pose you want to access. You learn how to use your yoga practice in various ways, including for psychological integration. At one point in your practice, you might choose to exert yourself physically to build muscle tone or work on your alignment, whereas at another point (or another posture) you may wish to slow down and process emotional content. At yet another point, you might explore the mystical aspect of the practice. In this way, titrating allows you to move fluidly through a practice and extract its various benefits—physical, psychological, and spiritual.

Practice 5: Pendulation

This practice refers to the process of moving between polarities in our experience—as if we were a pendulum. Pendulation occurs within us naturally unless we're disturbed by trauma or psychological wounding of some kind. We can, however, consciously discover pendulation by placing attention on the movement between polarities and opposites within us and bring these into relationship with each other. This practice helps create beneficial patterns in the nervous system that keep it from getting stuck in traumatic patterns, thereby slowly remodeling our brains. We can pendulate between feelings of joy, well-being, safety, and pleasure and the more disturbing and scary memories, emotions, physical pains, contractions, images, and sensations within the body. In the process of moving between polarities somatically, we encourage a neutralizing effect, much as what happens when we mix hot and cold substances.

Here's an outline for trying the practice yourself:

- Invoke one of the earlier resources and explore it in your body for a few minutes.
- Now choose a challenging memory, emotion, or situation to practice with. Don't start by picking something too major.

- Enter your body and turn toward this challenge, feeling whatever comes up as sensation in your body.
- Titrate out of the experience to a level you can manage to stay present with.
- Next, stay with the emotions, sensations, memories, and images in your body for between fifteen and sixty seconds. Do not stay longer than the set amount of time.
- Now back out of this part of the practice and return to the resource, staying with it until you feel it has been established again. Keep in mind that it's okay for a resource to change and develop as you practice pendulation.
- Pendulate between resourced and contracted places within yourself for two to five rounds, then move to *Savasana* (Corpse Pose) or take a break to integrate the experience.

We can practice pendulation between any set of polarities within ourselves. Pendulating between fear and love is particularly powerful, especially because love acts as such potent medicine for fear. I have witnessed the process of pendulation dissolve or change emotions into something else over time. When explored with love, painful emotions can even become pleasurable, empowering, and at times blissful. And when combined with other forms of resourcing and titration, pendulation allows people to encounter and move through fears, wounds, desires, and aspirations they have been too afraid to encounter before.

Practice 6: Saying Yes to the No

I learned this powerful practice for working with resistance from the late Advaita Vedanta master Arnaud Desjardins, and I have applied it

to therapy and yoga practice with potent results. Arnaud taught me that when we encounter a powerful memory, sensation, or emotion, our instinctual response is some degree of contraction in the body. This contraction can be subtle or strong, and it is usually accompanied by some type of corresponding thought. For example: *Things shouldn't be this way* or *I wish things were different*. This is the body's and psyche's instinctual way of saying *no* and protecting themselves against feeling. Even if we consciously wish to explore something or heal ourselves, our unconscious may still be hesitant, afraid, or resistant to open toward it. This *no* arises within us here and there to different degrees, and at times it may serve as a healthy boundary against something that doesn't feel safe or an inner experience that we're not yet ready to explore. At other times, however, the *no* is outdated—it only holds us back from increased freedom.

By learning to say *yes* to this *no*, we compassionately bring space, acceptance, and openness to challenging experiences. In asana, this means feeling into the sensation of *no* as a contraction or resistance in the body and allowing it to be there and soften as we place kind attention on it. We keep saying *yes* with words, our inner attitude, and slight self-adjustments in our posture until we find a small *yes* to our belief that things should be other than they are. This practice shifts our relationship with our contraction, often brings about more space within us, and lessens or changes the contraction itself.

At other times, we cannot say *yes* to the *no* because we feel too frustrated, stuck, resistant, or just not ready to do so. In this case, we try to allow ourselves to say *yes* to *not saying yes to the no*. If we are unable to do that, we can say *yes* to progressive levels of *no* within us. Somatically and psychologically saying *yes* to any amount of internal *no* acts as a kind of emotional asana, and people often report experiencing tremendous relief in being able to let their *no* simply be present in their conscious experience. Finally, just like any other asana, our ability to say *yes* to the *no* grows with gradual and sustained practice over time.

THE YOGA & PSYCHE METHOD: TEN STEPS FOR APPLYING SOMATIC TECHNOLOGY TO ASANA PRACTICE

Finally, I want to offer the Yoga & Psyche Method—a synthesis of the applications in this chapter as applied to asana practice. You can use the following steps whether teaching a yoga class, participating in one as a student, practicing at home, or exploring asana as a therapist, client, or dyad partner. These steps are offered as guidelines rather than as a precise sequence. Feel free to modify the instructions to suit the context of the given practice environment:

1. Assume a comfortable seated or standing position. Take a few breaths to relax, and gently scan and bring awareness to the body, noticing any emotion or sensation without trying to change it.
2. Next, invoke an embodied resource—a pleasurable or healing asana, pranayama, nature image, yogic visualization, or a pleasant sensation in the body.
3. Track the sensations of the resource and allow them to move and change. Attend to the sensations while noticing any emotions, images, memories, and insights that arise.
4. Choose an asana to practice with. You might select one you feel resistance to, or one you find more easeful. Both options present distinct benefits. (When repeating this exercise, try both.)
5. Enter the posture and find your edge. Then back out of the pose until you don't experience physical strain but you can still feel the physio-emotional impact of the asana. (Back out of a pose by at least 30 percent, and up to 90 percent or more.)
6. Bring loving attention to the sensations, images, and emotions that arise, titrating 2 to 5 percent deeper into contractions,

resistance, and feelings for short periods of time (between thirty and sixty seconds). Track sensations as they travel through the body.

7. Back out of the asana completely and move into a resourceful, easy, and nurturing pose such as Mountain Pose, Child's Pose (*Balāsana*), or seated meditation. Reestablish a sense of resource in the body.
8. Optional step: Reenter, or pendulate, into the asana in step 4, perhaps entering into the emotion or sensation 1 to 5 percent more deeply each time, or choosing to intensify the asana slightly.
9. Again, back out and return to a resourced pose. You can practice pendulation between three and five times, but always end with resourcing (step 2).
10. Finish with *Savasana* (Corpse Pose) or rest.

To summarize, this chapter gives you three key principles, six integrated practices, and a method to consolidate all of them with asana. Everything you find here explores the integration of yoga, psychology, somatics, trauma research, and neuroscience, and you can apply these practices in various contexts: in yoga, therapy, self-inquiry, and dyad practice, whether you are working as a student or teacher. Over time, you will progressively feel the tangible results of these practices and make refinements that suit your own work and personal life.

I offer these tools not as an endpoint but as a foundation for your own discovery. With them, may you explore how somatics, psychology, yoga, trauma studies, and neuroscience work together, support each other, and blend in surprisingly beneficial and potentially evolutionary ways. I encourage you to bring all of your knowledge, uniqueness, and gifts to this developing synthesis.