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The Solace of Grey: Yogic Perspectives on Healing Through Complex Trauma

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The Solace of Grey:
Yogic Perspectives on Healing
Through Complex Trauma

by

xyloh Gargiulo

A thesis project presented to the

Faculty of the Department of
Yoga Studies
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Yoga Studies

April 27th, 2022

The Solace of Grey

Yogic Perspectives on Healing Through
Complex Trauma

xyloh gargiulo

For my blood siblings, Joseph Benedict and Gina Marie.

I thank my brother for challenging me to redefine my perspectives. His brilliant, harsh intellect inspires me to always do more, whilst humbly keeping my pride in check. I thank my sister for nurturing all parts of my soul. Her emotional sensitivity is a strength that I admire; she is purely an angel incarnate.

Together our varying shades make a beautiful pallet.

[Disclaimer: Due to the nature of the topic, this work may present as triggering to some. Please do whatever is needed to take care of yourself.]

Acknowledgements

White foam of waves crash against the shore. For a split moment, there is complete transparency between solid and abstract grounds. Opaque ocean sweeps away terra firma as it finds retreat. Endless motion of give and take, ebb and flow, takes effect. From beginning my graduate education in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself embarking on an adventure filled with enlightening moments matched in impact with grave reminders of trauma. I could have never predicted I would find myself on such an immense path of healing that has unraveled during my time at LMU.

For my undergraduate career, I completed a dual major in Psychology and Philosophy as a means of attempting to bridge subjectivity with objectivity. The study of transpersonal psychology, transcendentalism, phenomenology, and spiritual traditions in Eastern mysticism is what introduced me to the principles of yoga. I discovered words for a lived philosophy I already practiced unknowingly. I hold utmost gratitude for having found my way unplanningly to the graduate Master of Arts in Yoga Studies program.

I give thanks to Professor Christopher Chapple for his exuberant sharing of knowledge. Convening in class was akin to attending dinner with an old friend. Discussion and meditation always somehow felt familiar even if on completely new topics. It has been nothing but a gift to learn under Christopher's guidance.

I cannot thank Dr Lori Fazzio enough for holding space so beautifully in light of balanced compassion and wisdom. She embodies the very principles of what yoga therapy ought to be. In navigating moments of intense triggers, Lori always curated the space needed to revivify safety, self-autonomy, and valuable instruction amidst significant undertakings. Experiential learning in such a way has greatly shaped my work in both professional career and personal self-development. Lori's presence establishes a sense of regulation in the mere act of her walking into a room. In severely struggling with my mental health

during the time of my graduate studies, I have doubt that I could have completed the program otherwise.

I give thanks to Viviana Vallin for her support and collaboration in learning what it means to take up space within oneself. Appreciation is given to Amy Osborne for her inspiration and ability to speak through her silent authenticity alone. I give thanks to each cohort member who contributed to creating a valuable and safe atmosphere. Lastly, I give thanks to my newly acquired little service dog, Kokiri, who has already made such an impact on my life where words fall short to express. I truly feel as though I was brought to LMU if not for the sheer reason of crossing paths with all those mentioned.

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[“When already in the grey of the dawn he sees the throng of muses dancing by, close to him, in the mist of the mountain; when afterwards, in the symmetry of his ante-meridian soul, he strolls silently under the trees, out of whose crests and leafy hiding-places all manner of good and bright things are flung to him, the gifts of all the free spirits who are at home in mountains, forests, and solitudes, and who, like himself, alternately merry and thoughtful, are wanderers and philosophers.”]

- Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

Outro: Landing

Where trauma strips one of self, yoga breeds connection back to Self. Through applied yogic philosophy, it becomes available for perhaps the first time for an individual to safely explore their own space of Being. Trauma uncovering is no easy task to take on. Viewing trauma as a response to experiences of adversity, there exists an ability of choice amidst deception of no control. An individual can absolutely dictate the way they choose to respond to any such situation. Yoga acts as one technique of gaining sight through the blinding darkness of trauma.

The writer's undergraduate senior thesis took on a spiritual approach to a topic in philosophy of mind. They sought to find ways to mediate between various realms, to bridge together ideals in an analytic way. Strength is conveyed in unconventionality. Appreciation is held for freedom in individuality and creative expression. The metaphysics of Being is certainly not an objective topic, but perhaps there is a way to drop subjectivity as well. Beyond perceiver and that which is perceived, there exists *perceiving*. This is the place of aim the writer holds to learn from and teach by. A growing edge is to translate such a world of fantasy and invisibility into a tangible form.

In formulating this Masters thesis, it is more so like establishing a creative project, which is a journey in itself to simply write. Following a topic of yoga and trauma, the intent is not to speak about yoga only as it pertains to mental health, nor just to physiological responses to trauma and how yoga can help. There is a drawing of insight from both these modalities, but all in effort to gain access to deeper states of the psyche. Thus ensues an exploration of finding ways to step into places where one's feet cannot touch. Speaking to a psychic layer of existence beneath both body and mind, this project will tie together theory from leading figures in trauma treatment such as Stephen Porges, David Emerson, and Bessel van der Kolk with ideas from phenomenal thinkers like Carl Jung, Edmund Husserl, and Sri Aurobindo. From transpersonal

psychologists and mystic philosophers to neurological perspectives and nondualism, a core theme is found of integrating connection back to Self. Since the basis of yogic practice involves settling into this space of union, therein lies the very connotation of utilizing yoga as a modality for healing trauma.

The deeper level of the psychic layer, underlying body and mind, can be said to be both where trauma lives and where it has the potential to be healed. To heal it, one must step directly into it. Yoga speaks to this congruency of opposition. The practice incorporates a holistic approach in cultivation of self-discipline, wherein one runs towards the exact thing they have been attempting to run away from. Creation through destruction occurs when facing that which is unwanted. Or one could fall into wonderment on what may happen if they simply stand on the threshold between places of acquisitionment. That is the yoga, and that is also perhaps the dwelling of trauma.

Question arises on how liberation is sought through this space of grey. Falling back into an area of neutrality bears with it a harmony in still wholeness. Resonance settles into prior locations of dissonance. Black and white not only meet in pure silver light, but come to breed into a full spectrum of colour; uncovering sublation in pure Being. That is what this project is trying to formulate, by way of utilizing different perspectives and approaches to find a center. This project thus acts as a gathering in synthesis of seemingly differing perspectives that lead into the same destination. Yoga is approached in light of psychology, physiological responses, transpersonality, and nondualistic philosophy. We can come to better understand the principles of yoga through trauma itself and, likewise, gain a better handle on trauma through the practice of yoga. The answer reached seems to be the same across these realms of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and spirituality. And for the premises of this project, "spiritual" may be interpreted as intuitive, cosmic, transcendental, purely subjective, or related to Self.

Through yoga we can come to discover what lies at the center; encompassing realms of beneath, behind, beyond, below, above, within, and without. In such places, healing is found through states of disconnect. Trauma is not something that happens to an individual, but is a response to one's experience. One has control over their ability to respond. Therefore, control can be obtained *through* trauma. A sense of autonomy is integrated when stepping out from victim mentality,

self-blame, and gaslighting or bypassing oneself. Could there be a way to honour the struggle that trauma has brought, while simultaneously holding gratitude? How does one begin to dust off the dirt of trauma storms and figure out where they lie within that obscurity? Finding connection with Self is the very epitome of yoga.

Stepping beyond a phenomenological world into transcendental, ineffable experience resonates when looking beyond where eyes can see, and listening beneath sound heard by one's ears. The writer's style of teaching and doing yoga entails a method of philosophical exploration in which the cosmos come to vibrate through the cells of a physical form and within the thought streams of imagination. The perceived realm is fabricated such as dreams. Behind reality lies true Reality. Interaction with that which is external to oneself simply brings one back to their soul, of which is reflective of the greater cosmic essence of *Brahman*.

i: Complex PTSD

Select few are familiar with the kind of tiredness that cannot be resolved by sleep. There is fatigue from feeling the lungs breathe. Autonomic functions become exhausting. It is hoped that for just one minute, the world can be put on mute. Hypersensitivity is wrenching. The ever present pain, deep in bones and hanging onto every nerve ending, is reminiscent of overbearing psychological weight. The mind may often wish for any form of escape in such moments. From the weight of a false cognitive framework to the strain of a nervous system stuck in a chronic stress response, everyday lived existence sometimes feels overbearing for those who have experienced complex trauma.

Whereas acute Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) typically occurs from one named event, Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) involves multiple events. C-PTSD is characterized by chronic, repeated, or prolonged experience of or exposure to traumatic events. The disorder could arise from physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse, physical or emotional neglect, abandonment, a situation of being held hostage, or witnessing or experiencing domestic violence. With repeated trauma, the body's nervous system takes on a pattern of maladaptive psychological and physiological reactions to stress. There is not a chance to recuperate. As a result, an individual internally learns to always be on alert, constantly searching for a source of danger, in order to survive. With a constant presence of threat, this could often lead to a hindered ability in feeling a sense of safety.

According to the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)*, criteria for a diagnosis of Complex PTSD parallels the same core symptoms of acute PTSD. These symptoms needed for diagnosis include an exposure to trauma, avoidance of situations or people that remind one of that traumatic event, re-experiencing of the trauma through flashback or nightmares, and a heightened sense of threat typically portrayed as hypervigilance or an increased startle response. Complex PTSD further indicates symptoms of affective dysregulation,

negative view of oneself and one's life, and disturbances in interpersonal relations.¹ *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) does not currently identify Complex PTSD as a separate diagnosis.

Affective, or emotional, dysregulation involves a difficulty in modulating emotions in relation with adaptability to external states. Depression and/or anxiety may persist in constancy. One might laugh when they mean to cry. They may be totally shut off from emotions whereas there is no external release until there occurs an uncontrollable outward explosion from suppressing too much. Getting in touch with emotions such as anger, grief, and resentment may be viewed as unsafe. Shoving these emotions down is like building a dam for a waterfall. Eventually it is going to crack and an outpouring will ensue. Such a state could provide a source of relief and also serve as a breakthrough. However, it can also lead one into spiraling conditions conducive for drowning.

Negative self-concept includes viewing oneself and the world around them in a pessimistic way. One may view themselves as worthless or sees life as meaningless. They may feel as though they are a failure no matter the effort. When going through a time of traumatic event that is hard to conceptualize, it may be easier to place blame on oneself as a means of justifying the event happening. A core belief that one is wrong in some way is then established. This reaches beyond feeling guilty about one's actions, and portrays as a learned shame that trails behind each step of one's existence. This is especially so if gaslighting is involved in the trauma as well. The individual may be repeatedly told that it is in fact their fault, that they are in the wrong, and that they are to blame. It is hard otherwise to not learn a helplessness that no matter what the individual does, they will always be incorrect. It can then feel as though they will always be trapped.

Potentially instilled from the aftermath of trauma is a consistent pattern of low self-esteem and self-deprecation. Self-sabotage can also be a present pattern. It sometimes seems easier to remove oneself from a scenario first before there is a chance for the ground to be stripped away. One may not feel deserving of having joyful people or experiences in their life, or it may not feel trusting. If abuse was present, then it could be the case that having achievements or positive experiences were used against the individual at one point in life. Fear is

instilled in what one has, guilt appears in what one does, and shame is ingrained in what one is.

If living within one's own skin is perceivably difficult, living amongst others and the world can also be challenging. Due to the common interpersonal nature of complex trauma, there likely may be developed disruption in relation to other people. An individual may have a hard time relating to others on emotional and existential levels. When it comes to interacting with people, immense mistrust is potentially construed. It may not be safe to express oneself in front of others, to the point of which even being around the presence of other people feels like a threat. Human presence in general may present as a trigger.

Re-experiencing complex trauma can often appear as an emotional flashback. There may not be a clear replaying of a memory with visual and/or auditory hallucinatory experience, as is the case in acute PTSD. Rather, with an emotional flashback, the individual will be thrown back into the *feeling* associated with a moment of traumatic event. This sort of flashback results from any number of triggers. A person in line at the grocery store may smile a certain way or wear a specific cologne that brings up a reminder of trauma. A scenario of being in an enclosed space without easy access to an exitway can pose as a trauma reminder. Sounds such as trickling water or a police siren have potential to ignite an emotional flashback. Oftentimes the cognitive mind will not be aware of what is happening. The body speaks to reminders of trauma by entering into a dysregulated state. More on dysregulation will be touched upon in the coming chapters.

C-PTSD tends to co-occur with other psychiatric disorders and conditions. This includes depression, anxiety, dissociation, and suicidal ideation. Also common are self-destructive behaviors like substance misuse, eating disorders, or self-harm. These behaviors serve as coping mechanisms for managing overwhelming emotions or as an attempt to feel something when one feels emotionally numb. They are a grim yet valid effort at self-regulation. In the premise of this project, yoga will be explored as an alternative method of regulating. It is a way to return safely back into the body.

Lack of feeling into one's body or sense of life energy corresponds with dissociative states. Dissociation is a disconnect from identity, emotions, memories, sensations, or other experiences of life. Dissociation portrays in two ways: derealization, or detachment from

reality, and depersonalization, which is a disconnect from oneself. An individual may feel as though they are floating above their body. The world around them may not seem real, like they are viewing life from behind a glass screen or within a dream. They may look in a mirror and not recognize the being staring back at them. Becoming numb to life is both a protective mechanism and a tactic of trying to suppress constant visceral warning signs that do not switch off. In addition to chronic suicidality and co-occurring psychiatric disorders, trauma exposure has also been shown to have a causal link to somatization.² The body speaks of psychological torment through physical symptoms. When dissociation appears as a survival tactic, body and mind learn to hide from themselves.

Though not in every case, a common way Complex PTSD can come to evolve is due to the occurrence of childhood trauma. Childhood is an imperative time of development physically, emotionally, and neurologically. A child experiencing abuse or neglect is often forced to grow up early. They may take on the role of having to be a parent for themselves, or even parenting a parent in addition. The traumatized child becomes adept at stepping between realms. They learn to compartmentalize, behaving one way at home and learning to hide in composure at school or around others who are unaware of the circumstances going on behind closed doors. The child may have learned that it is not safe to express emotions. Any expression of feeling could be used against them, be dismissed, or is otherwise invalidated.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are frequently linked to C-PTSD. Conducted over twenty years ago, the ACEs study looked at the effect of childhood traumatic events on health outcomes later in life. Adverse childhood experiences include various forms of abuse and neglect, growing up with a parent who was dealing with substance abuse or psychiatric illness, divorce, incarceration, and an otherwise disruptive or dysfunctional household. A score of up to 10 is given based on how many events an individual had endured before their eighteenth birthday. A score of four or more is considered to be severe. It is likely that if domestic violence is apparent, then incarceration or divorce amongst caregivers is also present. If there is a history of substance abuse, there is a probable chance of psychiatric illness.

Co-occurrence is likely, and risk begets risk in this aspect. Therefore, a score of four to ten is grouped together as severe.

The ACEs study found events of childhood trauma to be significant contributing factors to the development of both physical and mental health disorders later in life such as psychiatric illness, substance abuse, cancer, stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.³ It evidently showed a profound link between exposure to psychological trauma and rather crucial facets of physical dis-ease. Mental health is of course of concern as well. Those who experience four or more ACEs are thirty times more at risk for committing suicide.⁴ Time does not prove effective for remembrance of vital life events - whether that be in more positive or negative impact. Long-term untreated symptoms from mental health will of course affect other systems of the lived body; whether that be physical, physiological, neurological, behavioral, or spiritual. A humanistic approach looks at the body as one system. Congruent with somatization of psychiatric disorder, ACEs have been associated with conditions such as insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, migraines, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, and various neurological and endocrine disorders.⁵ Neglected mental hindrances may show up in the physical body. Going a layer deeper, unresolved psychic ailments may show up mentally. Getting to the core of messages that are manifesting is an endeavor that will be further delved into in later chapters.

At a point in the past, the nervous system was absolutely correct in trying to protect oneself from additional harm. With chronic exposure to trauma, the internal alarm system never gets a chance to turn off or reset. Overactive defense mechanisms now send the message that something is terribly wrong. Childhood abuse and neglect has been seen to show up as a heightened stress response in the body for decades after the events occurred.⁶ This may manifest as PTSD symptoms of arousal, numbing, avoidance, or vigilance. Both cognitively and subconsciously, the body does not know how to respond anymore. It is therefore safer to assume that everything is a threat at that point. Roughly 3.5% of adults in the US have a known diagnosis of PTSD.⁷ That is just shy of 8 million individuals; disinclining those who are not aware they fit diagnostic criteria or have not gotten the chance to be officially diagnosed. Psychiatric conditions act as patterns of interference.⁸ They, generally speaking, can be said to be reduced down to the same element causing them to manifest; of which

is being thrown out of tune with oneself. When one is unmelodious with their innate truth, it starts to show in various ailments. Events of trauma are what brings one out of tonality. In trying to avoid pain, one becomes removed from integrated wholeness.

Complex trauma throws one into a relentless cycle of exploitation of the self. Past stays alive as an instinctive feeling of gnawing discomfort.⁹ Discernment becomes clouded across inheritance of identity, mood, and action. Triggers take an inescapable hold; playing one like a puppet in drear captivity. Working with a psychotherapist and a trauma survivor's own cognitive awareness conjoined, the survivor can begin to untangle the jumbled mess of mixed signals that trauma responses leave them with. Becoming aware that one is not their trauma is a vital first step in healing through adverse experience. Further, learning about trauma as a response to events can aid in reidentifying with what is true to one's essence. Beneath these coats of defense, one has always been situated exactly where they belong.

ii: Entrapment

Being lost in a dissociative state can feel like the vapors of clouds. The disorientation is tranquilly directionless. Clouds drift quietly only to swiftly fade away. They are always there yet in infinitely different constancy. Sometimes they appear more visible, other moments far less than solid. Striking presence is balanced with unreachable distantness. Those fluffs of white are never actually stable. How one could wish to momentarily jump upon the clouds and feel in their own perception the inviting softness they deceptively portray. They come so close in moments of high altitude, submerged in cloud forest, and the instant we reach out to connect they go right through us.

Wispy roots stretch toward the cosmos. Appearing as though floating above, in retrospect they sit right in front of us, dangling off the sides of Earth as gravity makes it seem we are beneath. Hanging on the outskirts of the physical world, they try so desperately to be a part of it but are never able to touch ground. Clouds are dreamy for a reason. Birds must know for certain they are in heaven while amongst their ambient essence. One could ponder what it would be like to walk on solid ground while simultaneously carrying oneself in such an atmospheric presence.

Coming back into one's body is analogous to crash landing on earthly soil after floating through clouds for chronic periods of time. Risk of retraumatization presents in this process of treading footprints onto beingness. Settlement feels like a trap rather than contentment. With becoming conscious comes alienation.¹ We are indebted to leave an ineffable permanence to find our way through transliteration into a definitive world. Trauma sways in like smoke in an intertwined dance. Rather than a partnership, there is a competition for space. A task ensues that may be described as trying to catch wind. If we were to just stand in stillness with our palms open, we can hold the sky at our fingertips. We already have all that is to be attained.

Trauma competes with one's core identity relating to Self. The soul can be said to subsist on a mythopoetic place somewhere between fantasy and reality.² An intermediate matrix of superconscious experience is explored upon. Trauma treatment requires harrowing over layers of somatic and psychological ground to expose what had gotten buried amidst the cladden soil. Soul, the true essence of an individual, lies entombed, waiting to be resurrected once again. Therapeutic intervention could be said to serve as uninterrupted communication with the soul.

Common current treatment methods for Complex PTSD include Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Behavioral therapies aim to treat C-PTSD by providing solutions for regulating symptoms as they arise. CPT restructures belief surrounding the traumatic event, while incorporating desensitization through exposure therapy.³ DBT works to build psychological skills such as mindfulness and affect regulation.⁴ EMDR helps to process a trauma memory from the outside in through a more somatic approach that works with bilateral stimulation of the brain.

The concern with cognitive-behavioral therapies is that there greatly lies a risk of retraumatization. Not much accomplishment occurs in session if the individual's nervous system resorts to a dissociative freeze response, or if moments become too intense whereas the client relives their trauma in a muddled skew of panic. Bringing the body into treatment is a first step in allowing the nervous system a chance to set the pace and intensity of the sessions. Further, bringing body and mind into integration aids to create an atmosphere to dive deeper into oneself without losing touch with present reality. Complex PTSD can be understood as a dis-ease of remembering too much. A constant stress response to past events of trauma brings one out of the present. A huge facet of healing may very well be the act of becoming present again with oneself. Feeling a sense of centered emotionality radiates as a physiological homeostasis in the body.

Coming into mind-body balance would be immensely beneficial for survivors of complex trauma because of the feeling of safety and security that comes with homeostatic states.⁵ Therapies that invite in creative expression tie in this concept of mind-body integration. They

involve harmonization of the logic-based left brain and intuition-based right brain. Thinking and feeling can learn to mingle together in congruent communication. Yogic practice can be characterized as a form of creative expression whereas one is free to bask in their own space. Utilizing breath as a resource, yoga serves as a key for unlocking connection between mind and body. It is a direct way to tap into the autonomic nervous system, where physiology converses with mental state. In consistent yogic practice, the nervous system follows a methodology of recalibration. This radiates across levels of body, mind, and soul.

Yoga presents five layers or coverings to existence called *koshas*. On the physical sphere is *annamaya kosha*, with the energetic subtle body is *prāṇamaya kosha*, the mental body is *manomaya*, intellect is *vijñānamaya*, and the spiritual or bliss body is *ānandamaya*.⁶ Core of consciousness is insulated through these sheaths, with *annamaya kosha* being the very outer layer. The theory of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy in psychological theory entails building a foundation from basic needs of safety and survival through layers of biology, sociology, psychology, and eventually reaching up to self-actualization. Is it possible that a process of security could be done backwards, in which one starts to build a foundation from a place of self-actualization as a means of attaining a sense of safety and meeting needs?

Cognitive-behavioral models of psychology deal with seemingly lower levels of consciousness that are portrayed as action, sensory processing, and functions of the thinking mind. Yoga taps into higher levels of transcognitive states of psychic knowing. The therapeutic application of yogic philosophical practice involves a facilitation of reconnecting with one's eudaimonic state of well-being. The divulgence of self-actualization is reflective of settling into one's own space of Being.

A prerequisite step to living in full realization is self-regulation, or harmonization of one's response to both external and internal environments.⁷ Those with C-PTSD live in a dysregulated state on a neurological level. In terms of a maladaptive stress response, the very thing that is trying to protect the individual is now inhibiting the ability to heal. The intent of yoga as a modality for healing trauma is to bring the individual back Home to themselves. This may look like an enhanced ability to self-regulate, a felt sense of internal safety and

security, and a discovering of inner peace. As yoga draws an individual more inward, they come to reside in integrated Being. With supported awareness the individual can work towards realizing that they are not defined by their trauma and they can be brought back into the state of wholeness they already innately are.

Studies have shown that conventional treatments for trauma still leave residual symptoms months after completion.⁸ Talking about a past event can very quickly spiral into a moment of fully reliving it. Treatment intervention may actually cause more harm in this sense. Along with the risk of retraumatization, dissociation can also pose a challenge for trauma work. In absence of these two affairs, there still seems to be something lacking in conventional talk therapy. Trauma proposes that we step deeper than working through cognitive states alone. With such a profound injury on the self, we are presented to look at the core makeup of what constitutes “self”. Tuning into one’s inner subjective experience, beneath where thought-forms can reach, may be of necessity. Perhaps the mere space to develop skills to tune into one’s own subjective experience, or interoceptive aspects, is the missing link in treating trauma. The individual must come to an integrative embodiment.

In the field of psychology, behaviorism speaks to a mechanism of stimulus-response in organisms. Similar to physicalism in the field of philosophy, it justifies earthlings as little more than machines. What differentiates earthlings from artificial life forms is the attribute of qualia, or internal experience. Containing qualia can be explained by the theory of cosmopsychism which says that the only thing that ontologically exists is cosmic consciousness.⁹ Rather than an inner quality contained, qualia is viewed as a state of Being always present whether in a physical form or not. Self acts as an inner process. Such a theory supports how ineffability can be translated into embodied form. Naturally this combines well with the workings of yoga, turning cosmopsychic ideas into something real. We can use both body (bottom-up) and mind (top-down) avenues, but ultimately we are posed to learn a different language; one that somehow speaks both mind and body and yet neither. This begins to constitute the formulation of self.

With trauma comes a loss of self. Spirituality involves the connotation of self as a lived experience of the Universe. Therefore,

healing through trauma is a spiritual journey insofar as it presents as a path leading back to oneself. The level of soul poses as the core of embodied Self,¹⁰ a pure subjective experience. This is an existence known deeply in one's sense of Being that fails to be defined by cognitive knowledge. Also within the space of that which cannot be reasoned by rationality are encounters with trauma. How could it possibly be rationalized that such terrible things happen to innocent lives? Trauma allocates mystery into a liveable story. Unconscious becomes conscious, lingering within the inbetween space of the subconscious.

Within realms dormant and wakeful, there may be various parts or complexes to the personality of a traumatized individual; a fraying of identification. Some parts come alive when triggered, others never seem to show unless completely in isolation. Trauma designs an existential injury. Those who experience C-PTSD are "existentially forced into a nonexistence" (Kalsched, 2013). Reminiscent of autoimmune disease, there abides a system attack on oneself. Treating the physical symptoms will not stop the origination of this spreading of seeds. Tackling past trauma head on is a mere act of assassination on a part of the individual who had experienced it. Except, we are not actually killing the undesired, but trapping them within life. One could argue the latter to be worse.

iii: Psychoneurology

It is safer to assume that a stick is a snake, rather than walk past a snake thinking it is a stick. Our nervous system is quite intelligent in its protective nature, albeit the distortion from an overrun stress response. With prolonged exposure to trauma comes an inability to properly process. Emotional dysfunction gets in the way of the nervous system sending accurate signals to parts of the brain correlated with regulation, such as the anterior cingulate and the insula.¹ The body signals to the mind that there is impending danger present even when there is no such case. Mental state could thus respond with anxiety and altered belief that something is truly wrong or otherwise unsafe. Therefore, the body gets thrown into an inappropriately proportioned state of either hypo- or hyperarousal.

When the nervous system is regulated, one may have associated feelings of presentness, connection, and engagement with life. This is what is known as being within the window of tolerance. When a person grounds themselves, they are essentially stepping into this space. Present flow of communication occurs in the brain between the emotional limbic system and the more cognitive prefrontal cortex. Mind and body are in ample connection. When within the window of tolerance, one is able to stay in a state of emotional regulation. As a response to trauma, the width of the window of tolerance shrinks. Everyday occurrences have potential to become massive triggers for the nervous system in which all is perceived as danger or threat. The system gets thrown out of the window of tolerance and oscillates to either extreme of overdrive or shut down.

At the bottom of the wave of nervous system dysregulation is hypoarousal. This is when one's system gets stuck on "off". The nervous system switches into a freeze response. A more severe presentation of hypoarousal is shut down. In effect, this is where an organism is seen to play dead as a way of escaping severe imminent threat. There is loss of muscle tone, tonic immobility or temporary paralysis of the body, and

the individual may faint and become unconscious. A less severe form of freeze can present as depression, chronic fatigue, and symptoms of dissociation. There is a numbness that pervades across physical and emotional margins. In effort to protect one's being, systems of the body and mind check out in order to avoid feeling pain. Dissociative amnesia may take place in this case, whereas there are lapses in memory because it is far too much for any system to process all at once.

Also as a protective mechanism, at the top of the wave of dysregulation is hyperarousal. This is when the nervous system gets stuck on "on". The system is thrown into a sympathetic flight or fight response. When stuck in this state, an individual can experience anxiety, hypervigilance, and chronic pain due to muscles and joints tensing in constant preparation to flee. Thoughts race in mimicry of a racing heart. This is the kind of visceral flooding reaction one feels when startled by an unexpectedly loud noise; except the noise does not completely turn off. Left is a felt residuum of needing to jump out from one's skin.

The individual must often move through hyperarousal from a freeze state in order to settle back into equilibrium. Traumatic stress causes a swaying between these two extremes, or perhaps even experiencing both ends at once. If someone's system was "frozen" for quite a long time, the thawing process can be wrenching. Defrosting can be a painful proceeding in itself as feeling is regained. It is of hope that the swing of antipodal points eventually finds its way back to center. In learning regulation, the window of tolerance is thus able to widen. Yoga works to mitigate the stress response of flight-fight-freeze and bring the body back into equilibrium.² It provides a space to utilize skills to be able to self-regulate at a base of a neurological stance. Consistent practice of yoga through applied philosophy, *āsana* (postures), *prāṇāyāma* (breath and mind control), and meditation can help widen the window of tolerance to better keep an individual sustaining within it.

Neuropsychiatrist Dr. Stephen Porges proposed the Polyvagal Theory in relation to autonomic functioning. In his psychophysiological research, Porges found the vagus nerve to play a key role in the detection of safety. The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve of which is a main governing factor of parasympathetic control. When

stimulated, it sends signals to the nervous system telling it that it is safe. Polyvagal Theory consists of three neural platforms: ventral vagal complex (VVC), sympathetic nervous system (SNS), and dorsal vagal complex (DVC). The vagus nerve divides into the two pathways of ventral vagal and dorsal vagal.

Each neural platform is associated with a yogic quality of nature, or *guṇa*. The *guṇas* are present in all things natural such as sunlight and the moon, as well as in personality and food. They provide as common soil between mental and physical phenomena, manifesting as both the perceiver and that which is perceived as material object.³ If the nervous system speaks in dialectic ways back and forth between a perceiver and some thing that is perceived, that means that in there lies the act of pure perception-as-such. Getting deeper into this space that sits in the middle of subject and object is of significant interest for this written project and its explorations.

The branch of the ventral vagal complex involves our social engagement system. It detects safety both in the external environment and internally within oneself. As supportive of a homeostatic state, ventral vagal is associated with the *guṇa* of *sattva*, or purity and harmony.⁴ The sympathetic nervous system involves our mechanism of flight or fight. This is often the body's first defense against threat. Activating mobilization, SNS detects danger and is associated with the *guṇa* of *rajas*, or passion and activity.⁵ On the other end of the spectrum, the dorsal vagal complex involves parasympathetic freeze or collapse. It perceives life threat and primitively responds by way of immobilized shutdown. This is associated with the *guṇa* of *tamas*, which is inertia.⁶ The way the body reacts to external stimuli is not of conscious control. However, the individual can choose how they wish to respond to that reaction.

Porges coined the term, neuroception, to describe the nervous system's ability to subconsciously pick up on danger in one's environment.⁷ The neuroceptive state in which the body is responding to perceived sense of threat has a direct influence on an individual's access to certain emotions and behaviors. The vagus nerve specifically communicates with parts of the brain that deal with affect regulation. FMRI imaging shows how stimulation of the vagus nerve activates the regions of the brain involved with emotional processing.⁸ This serves as a bottom-up explanatory rationale as to why those with C-PTSD may

have difficulty with managing emotions, apart from conditioned cognitive misbeliefs. Their nervous system does not tell the brain that it is safe to feel anything at all. Mechanisms of the body impact thought trails of the mind.⁹ If an individual's body neurologically does not feel safe, it is unlikely that they will be able to feel mentally secure.

When an individual's nervous system is wired to a sympathetic state in constant search of danger, a felt sense of safety is seemingly inaccessible. A therapeutic yoga approach works to fundamentally rewire the nervous system. This undertaking serves as a way to cultivate perceived safety from the inside out, regardless of one's external environment. Yoga helps the body to more quickly counter stress by increasing vagal tone.¹⁰ As previously mentioned, the ventral vagal system promotes self-regulation and resiliency. Specific yogic practices can be utilized to stimulate the vagus nerve and help shift autonomic state into that of ventral vagal which perceives safety, engagement, and connection. The individual's nervous system then is able to move towards more adaptive bottom-up and top-down communicative processes. Additionally, mindfulness practices are suggested to inhibit the ill effects of physiological response in relation to perceived threat,¹¹ thus promoting long-term coping.

Healing for C-PTSD involves moving beyond survival reactivity mode and into a state of present living, to build towards that of thriving. When faced with a perceived threat, the body reacts with either a sympathetic flight-fight reaction or a parasympathetic freeze response. This natural survival mechanism is essential in the face of acute threat. Optimally, the body self-regulates back to a homeostatic state upon resolution of the threat. Just as a wound will close, the body knows how to heal itself. To stop this decay, an environment can be promoted within the body that allows for natural rejuvenation and healing properties. In other words, the body can be helped into a state of parasympathetic rest-and-digest where repair is done.

With complex trauma, everyday occurrences have the potential to be a trigger. The body becomes continuously stuck in one or more dysregulated states.¹² Yoga helps to lower activity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal, or HPA, axis which is associated with stress response. Through yogic practice, a dysregulated nervous system can start to heal from a psychoneurological basis, consequently enhancing a parasympathetic state.

What is of interest also is to stop whatever is causing decay. Therein envelops a deeper process than just symptom reduction. History of trauma brings with it the presence of psychic wounds. Almost like metaphorical scar tissue, mobility is limited across various domains of lived empiricism. One becomes immobilized in existential pain. Yoga psychology says that pain is due to the cotangling of object and subject.¹³ Mistaking one's empirical world as their true essence parallels a mingling with the body or ego as identity. Further, there is the notion that separation paradoxically elucidates a path leading to unification. Separating from an identity once known leads one into wisdom. Human emerges as a container for universal consciousness.¹⁴ Can it be possible to experience both turmoil and ecstasy at the same time, to bleed into the ethereal with cauterization through earthly form without dismissing any which realm?

Dismissiveness and escapism are very valid ways of attempting to cope with pain that is overwhelmingly too much. Detaching from life is actually a very smart way to put up a safety net. Dissociation supplies a metaphysical container for comfort and protection. Without a stable presence in tangible footing, trauma accordingly needs to be processed on a different plane. Talk therapy, with focal points on thought and emotion, is insufficient.¹⁵ Somatics begins to incorporate sensation into treatment. But aside from mind and body, something else is missing. The soul is a necessary component.

Soul is referred to here in this project not in the sense of religion, but as a sort of psychic intuitive energy. Soul is the essence of Self. What if trauma is actually a wound on the psyche; a masking of one's soul or inner core essence? The word, trauma, translates as "wound" after all. Rather than try to eradicate suffering that has already been experienced, one can look to prevent further malady now.¹⁶ Surrendering to the present is a hard act in itself. Trauma healing is too complex to only see symptom reduction. With such a wound on self-identity, there must be a way to achieve the ability to maintain. Yoga has shown to provide this sense of lasting stability that may be missing in other trauma treatment interventions.¹⁷ The labyrinthine propensity of trauma proposes us to seek beneath the mundane.

iv: Connection to Self

asato ma sat gamaya // lead me from the unreal to the real
tamaso ma jyotir gamaya // lead me from darkness into light
mṛtyormā 'mṛtaṃ gamaya // lead me from death to immortality
[-Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.3.28]

Sitting in the natural orbit of one's Being is accompanied with a euphoria that cannot be provided by any external substance. Where dissociation is a disconnect from oneself, yoga is connection back to Self. In the West there lies a misconstrued connotation of yoga equating to strictly physical exercise. Yoga means to yoke, to coalesce in communion with one's inner cosmic landscape whereas body and mind unite in oneness. Coming from the Sanskrit root word *yuj*, or union, yoga is a connection to higher Self. The integral practice entails a bridging of mind, body, and breath. Individual consciousness comes to unite with universal consciousness. An exploration of Being ensues between subjective and objective experiences. Yoga serves as an embodied psychospiritual path of cosmic unification within the art of stillness. One can come to traverse personal narrative through a lens of the psychospirituality of yoga.

Spirituality can be viewed as a philosophical craft reaching beyond human comprehension. Convening quite closely with one's intuitive or spiritual side, yoga is the implementation of this wise art. Yoga has been recognized in spiritual practice in Hinduism since ancient times. The custom has taken many diversities and developments since its roots, branching to various psychospiritual disciplines throughout the globe. In Hinduism, *Vedānta* tradition describes a relationship between matter (*prakṛti*) and Spirit or Consciousness-in-itself (*puruṣa*). Objects and perceptions of objects, or percepts, are both said to manifest as *prakṛti*.¹ They are reflective of the pure perceptual state of *puruṣa*, in which there exists an infinite perduring of awareness itself. The

material world is reflective of cosmic essence. Like nature reflecting cosmos, individual consciousness mirrors universal consciousness. Yoga at its root is the process of joining these two apparatuses.

Ancient Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Upaniṣads* further explain how yoga was first instilled. Early practitioners lived the practice intertwined with their personal and familial identities. The *Bhagavad Gītā* speaks through analogy and metaphor to offer various paths of yoga. These paths include repeated practice of handing faith over to the Divine, obtaining knowledge through contemplation, and selfless action; *bhakti* yoga, *jñāna* yoga, and *karma* yoga, respectively.² Analogy aids to give language to what is felt. Poetic exploration further guides one on a mission in their incarnated form by way of stretching beyond space and time.

There is one moment of melody that trickles in vanity amongst the clouds, the mountains, and the leaves. Rays of sunlight provide cosmic vitality. A scaffolding of celestial foundation latently permeates through the Earthly world. Following deep understanding of humbleness, knowledge arises on how interpersonal relationship extends beyond just human to human. Our relationship to the Earth speaks to our relationship to ourselves as human. All holds the same essence.

A sort of alchemy occurs when loosening the grip of translation. Studying what it means to exist in this world involves an introspective step into that which cannot be formulated into words. An inseparable essence pervades experience of Being. In that, an underlying unity is found amongst all objects, subjects, and percepts. Yoga can be said to be this harmonized dissonance where inner and outer worlds bridge together. Physicality and spirituality meld in sublimity. Facets of yoga in Hinduism and Buddhism encompass nonduality, oneness, and contemplation on wisdom.

The thought system of *Vedānta*, as laid out in the *Upaniṣads*, follows the notion that there exists a realm of nonduality of which can be experienced through an illusory physical world. Perhaps derealization has a validity to teach after all. Some perspectives in Buddhism too would agree that all can be reduced to one essence. Essential reality lies beneath an empirical world, consisting of *a priori* knowledge, or known without having experienced it. Experience is thus constructed upon delusion.³ One's relation to their own imaginative inner world is what creates their external reality. Deriving as truth

itself, Being is said to come from non-Being.⁴ The essence of everythingness is extracted from no-thingness. Opposition often holds the key for entering into intuitive understanding. Looking past illusion is achieved by stepping directly into it. Wisdom is held in such a space beyond physical and behind purely spiritual, between the Earth and the sky, where language of the psyche flourishes in absence of tangibility.

The space element of æther is the beginning and end of everything and nothing. This is similar to the notion of emptiness expressed in Buddhism. The element of space allows for infinite potentiality. An unfilled cup is so empty that it is entirely full; devoid of water but overflowing with air. Through opposition of polarity, a sublation into Beingness occurs whereby following an existence of oblivion. Emptiness equates to matterlessness. It is fertilizer for boundless subtlety.⁵ Yoga invites the practitioner into this sort of liminal space. It is here that one comes to meet wisdom in divine subjectivity.

At the base of unity lies soul, or *ātman*. The soul is an ineffable subjective expression of the unconscious. The subjective self of *ātman* is reflective of a greater cosmic Reality, *Brahman*. *Ātman* is identifiable as *Brahman*. Every drop of the ocean contains within it the ocean itself. Standing as wholes within each part, *ātman* as *Brahman* and all its manifestations make up the fibers of what constitutes as existence. Understanding that which appears as external to oneself is best done so by way of peeking into one's own Self. Following extrospection, entered here is the deeply intrinsic thought of introspection; marked is the beginning of immeasurable philosophical thought.⁶ *Jīva*, or life containing a soul, is the moment when the consciousness of *Brahman* is reflected upon, and through, *ātman*.

Exploring the realms of one's inner psyche acts as a means of stepping out into the greater cosmic Divine. Within consciousness "are contained both heaven and Earth, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lightning and stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess" (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 8.1.3). Psyche and cosmos are two sides of the same coin, microcosmic and macrocosmic. The extent of the cosmos reflects waves of the psyche. Individual consciousness resides like mountains amongst a cosmic landscape.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* references a cosmic wholeness in which body, mind, and soul come into unity. "From this Soul comes forth all vital energies, all worlds, all gods, all beings" (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*

Upaniṣad, 2.1.20). Different substances of the human experience are derived out of this cosmic union. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* proclaims how psychic states stem from immaterial essence. Hence breeds the intellect, *buddhi*. From there is manifested thought, emotion, and sensation. External experience of materiality only exists because there is a perceiver to perceive it. In Buddhism, material nature is not Self. The Self is composed in the underlying immateriality of its own manifestations.

The subjective Self, or soul, indwells breath, sensation, and understanding. It is the thinker who does not abide by thought, and the understander who cannot be understood. It is necessary to step beneath where cognitive function can reach in order to come to know the soul. The soul is they who is “dwelling in the moon and stars, yet is other than the moon and stars, whom the moon and stars do not know, whose body the moon and stars are, who controls the moon and stars from within” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.7.11). One must quiet the mind in order to give their soul a chance to be heard. The mind amidst process is one that perceives.⁷ A mind devoid of process exists in centeredness. Like a spider, one sits in stillness in a web of their own creation while everything they need comes to them. Tending to these needs is a process of consciousness; the state of Being is consciousness in itself.

Transcending beyond polarity, nonduality of *Advaita Vedānta* in Hinduism, as well as the Middle Way in Buddhism, offer an atmosphere of grey. Such lies middle ground where black and white integrate. The state of emptiness serves as an escape from duality; somewhere between, or beyond, annihilation and that which is eternal.⁸ This stance of intense neutrality is where one can sit as the silent witness to all experience, fully engulfed and yet entirely detached. One reaches attainment of liberation in *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*. This is also the intermediate space where yoga and trauma blend together. The body neurologically gives expression to trauma and the mind psychiatrically presents reaction to trauma as disorder. Deeper established, trauma is housed in this area of grey. Destruction derives from the same substance we pull creation from.

The root of all healing is connecting back to the core of our Being, the core of Self. Essentially, that is yoga. One stands as the entire Universe in a human shape. According to yoga psychology, the

mind-body complex is the instrument of experience that consciousness bears witness to.⁹ Pure intuitive understanding liberates from the confinement of body and the traps of mind. In the lens of the intellect, *jñāna* yoga is a path that guides one to *mokṣa* upon contemplation of Self. Buddhism speaks to transformation of darkness into light through means of transcendental knowledge.¹⁰ One must allow their shadow to dance in the trace of their illuminance. We learn how to live when we allow our self to die; stepping wholly into Self, beyond where conceptualization can reach. There, Truth screams in silence. Only then can wisdom be heard.

Observance is more effectual than rationalization. Fully grasping an experience in meek observation is not accessed by thought. That is why the heart of a thinker is made heavy by art.¹¹ A piece of art is absorbed and understood by the perceiver within intuitive contemplation, not necessarily by reasoning how the artist chose to paint a line a certain way or why they stuck to only two colours. Yoga speaks as an art form through a proclamation of loud silence. It allows for the practitioner to sit in a space between rational and irrational, behind feeling and thinking, in a blending of real and distortion. Immense clarity screams through apparent deception. Observation falls into thoughtful awareness based on intention.¹² We come to understand an embeddedness of temporal and limitless engagement, in equal balance of expression and reflection.

With external engagement comes internal processes. For instance, when noticing if you are feeling anxious, where does this appear in the body? This might be felt as a tightness in the chest. There is no need to try to change or fix anything, but you are simply noticing that there is anxiety present and that there is a possible correlation in the body with this anxiety. And that is all there is to it; just noticing. What happens then is a sort of magick really. Next time you are walking through life and feel that tightness in your chest, immediately you will come back to the awareness that you are not anxious, but that there is anxiety. Maybe then you are able to breathe.

When we put a name to something, it takes power away from it. Rather than a looming or lurking feeling that is always hidden in a crevice of sly awareness, we can step back in full attention and recognize something for what it is. Yoga helps to cultivate this presence of heightened awareness. We are able to disidentify with that which

does not serve us nor defines us. The act of disidentification gives power back to the individual. An amygdala hijack can be avoided by noticing emotions without allowing oneself to get pulled under drowning waters. We can recognize things as they are, with the discernment of knowing who exactly we are.

Finding safety in connection enables us to be able to weather the storms of trauma. An internal sense of shelter is constructed upon remembrance of who we are. Resiliency spills into the cracks left from traumatic dismantilization. True identity is lived once false lies are decloaked. Through consistent practice of yoga, one is reminded of their divine nature. Yogic philosophy has a place in various healing formulas, following a journey of coming into ontological resonance. The stars begin to shine once again in one's soul.

v: Felt Safety

“The world outside your skin is just as much you as the world inside: they move together inseparably.”

-Alan Watts

Having a body in this physical realm is life’s greatest deception; we are bound by the confines of skin not realizing that we are the same stuff of stars. How is it that one is meant to feel free whilst encased in perceptual impediment? We are challenged to quiet the senses whereas they open into a desolate terrain of infinitum. Deliberately withdrawing from the external world opens pathways to hidden crevices that lie beyond externality. In such a way, it is possible to bring the stars down to Earth and be swept by their trails of dust to enter into an entire universe held inside.

In the practice of yoga, there is space available to notice one’s inner experience and start to build the tools to tolerate whatever may be present there. A trauma-sensitive yoga approach promotes finding empowerment in opportunity of choice. For example, the practitioner can willingly choose to stop hurting themselves if something is causing harm, whether that be physical pain or psychological strain. They are in control of how they choose to participate, if at all. There elicits an honouring of one’s own wishes in consciously and mindfully choosing how they want to protect themselves rather than being hijacked by an amygdala reaction. The yoga session is individually modified to suit one’s own needs in that particular moment. Established is a sense of coherence by integrating aspects of subjective experience. This can simply be done through matching movement with breath.¹

Aside from aiding in establishing a safe external space, yoga can also help create an internal sense of stability. A therapeutic yoga approach begins to dive deeper beneath the surface of what is causing one’s symptoms to arise. Psychotherapy typically utilizes a top-down method for regulation, while yoga uses both top-down and bottom-up

modalities.² The embodied aspect of yogic practice is beneficial for supplementing the process of healing through C-PTSD. This is due to the notion that trauma is to an extent stored in places of the physical body. Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk describes trauma as an imprint left on the nervous system.³ Remnants of past responses to trauma can thus be released by working through the body. Finding embodiment can also be beneficial for those with a history of complex trauma because they likely have been out of their body for some time.

Those who experience C-PTSD can train their mind through psychotherapy to stay calm when faced with a trigger, but the nervous system may still react to a trigger even if one feels mentally steady. This is why both top-down and bottom-up approaches are imperative. Through yoga, the body and the mind learn to work together to tell the other that they are safe. Newly emerging somatic therapies are understanding the need of incorporating the physical body in one's healing process. However, a strictly bottom-up approach is not necessarily the answer either. Yogic practice can be viewed as a centered approach where there is simultaneous flow of top and down, front and back, past and future, material and immaterial, experience and essence.

Through yoga a safe sense of presence can be established. An individual is given the support to face themselves, to better handle situations that may be triggering, and to find moments of ease. There is power in choosing how one wishes to express themselves. This act of empowerment alone suffices as supplemental healing through trauma. Influences on the mind show a direct link to health of immunology and the nervous system.⁴ A therapeutic yoga viewpoint focuses on psychophysiological balance by establishing methods for coping with stress and maintaining equanimity on the level of mind.⁵ Yogic practices also allow support for the parasympathetic nervous system in moving towards ideal balance on a physiological level. Improvements may be instilled within functions such as perception of threat, interoception, processed fear, affect regulation, and defense reaction.⁶

There lies great potential for a therapeutic yoga approach as an effective supplement to talk-therapy for complex PTSD. This is due to the challenges of dissociation, avoidant nature, mistrust of others, and lack of body awareness often seen with complex trauma.⁷ There is only so much that is reached if one is not present with themselves and with

their life. Yoga may instill more confidence and stabilization in moods and physiological arousal in order to effectively face past trauma without fully reliving it. When we reduce the risk of retraumatization, we increase the possibility of healing.⁸

Bessel van der Kolk helped to conduct a study where women with a chronic diagnosis of PTSD attended an hour-long yoga class session once a week for 10 weeks. The study resulted in over half of the participants no longer meeting the criteria for chronic PTSD after having been diagnosed for at least three years.⁹ Results were seen after the eighth week. Just eight total hours of trauma-informed yoga released more than fifty percent of participants from a persistent clasp of maladaptive stress response due to exposure to repeated trauma. The power of yoga ought not to be dismissed as a supplemental treatment to Western psychological therapies for helping to heal through complex trauma. The study conducted by Dr. van der Kolk and David Emerson showed that yoga significantly reduces symptoms of post-traumatic stress.¹⁰ Traditional psychotherapeutic intervention often disregards the body. Standing apart from other treatment interventions, yoga provides a holistic approach that incorporates body, mind, and soul.

Complex PTSD can very well strip one of their own presence. Yoga provides integral avenues for getting one back into their body and becoming present with themselves. This thus encourages present engagement in life. Through yogic practice, individuals with C-PTSD can find support in cultivating an internal, felt sense of safety. Beyond a conceptualized understanding of what it may feel like to be safe, it is of aspiration that the individual may gather the tools to navigate their way to safety as an inner resource that is felt deep within oneself. There is movement away from identification with experiences of trauma. One comes to recognize that they are not their pain. They are not what had happened to them. The heaviness they carry around is a weight meant for gravity to hold. In moving towards an unwavering sense of safety, no external circumstance can hinder one's ability to be with oneself. They can come to rediscover the sacred essence they hold that perhaps trauma had wiped away. The point of yogic practices within a trauma-informed lens is to bring one into deeper awareness. This breeds greater connection with their emotions, bodies, triggers, and external stimuli.

Trauma-sensitive yoga was designed to allow for complex trauma survivors to feel safe within their own skin. The trauma-informed approach helps to protect the psychological safety of each participant. Triggers are mitigated when possible, and tools are provided for regulation when triggers do arise. Trauma-sensitive yoga is most effective as an adjunct treatment in teamwork with a psychotherapist. Since everything can be a potential trigger, it is not feasible to try to eliminate them entirely. Nonverbal practices of yoga provide a means of working through these triggers as they do arise without a need for verbally processing the trauma associated with them. Like putting out a flame to prevent potential harm, a defusion takes place in the art of stillness and Being.

Yogic practices are especially beneficial for individualized trauma journeys due to the incorporation of both cognitive top-down, and physiological bottom-up, approaches. Complex trauma is complex; it will likely require more than one avenue for healing. Yoga serves as a phenomenological process of integrating physiological and cognitive functions.¹¹ Through simultaneous bottom-up and top-down approaches, yoga can provide the space for an individual to fall back into inner stillness whereas their own intuition gets the chance to speak. With trauma comes a loss of choice. Trauma-sensitive yoga reestablishes empowerment as related to self-agency. Innate healing occurs from the inside out and outside in. Metamorphosis takes shape from chronic feelings of unsafety to integrative security; coming back in touch with Self.

Mind-body practices such as yoga support the building of connection within oneself whilst providing techniques for natural self-soothing. The contents of this written project speaks to yoga as supplemental healing for complex trauma across various layers of Being. This is partly undertaken by way of befriending one's nervous system. Research in the field of neuroscience supports the notion that acquainting oneself with their own inner experience can create change and healing on levels of neuroplasticity to existential concerns.¹² The result of trauma can very well engrain in someone the false belief that they are wrong simply for existing. Utilizing curiosity to approach aspects of oneself associated with shame imparts transformational adjustment. This entails focusing attention on healing what was once considered as "wrong", coming from a place that feels wholly right.¹³

How could there be something to treat if one is not inherently broken? A dichotomy exists though in not knowing who one is outside of their experiences of trauma, yet knowing exactly who they are within. Therapeutic application of yoga provides the space for the individual to guide their way back to an unchanging inner resonance.

Mindful movement is one practice that can be utilized to help cultivate a safe internal experience for those dealing with C-PTSD. *Āsana*, or yoga posture, provides support for feeling back into the body as well as training the nervous system to better respond to external and inner stimuli. Yoga postures can be utilized to help cultivate body awareness, increase one's connection with themselves, and promote balance both physiologically and psychologically. On the mat, the practitioner learns through metaphor, which prevails into life off the mat. Some *āsanas* may feel wildly unpleasant for the first few breaths until the muscles and nerves get a chance to relax. Holding in stillness releases tension across all planes of existence. The practitioner learns how to find comfort within discomfort. Tolerance is slowly built across domains of physicality, mentality, neurology, and emotionality.

With *āsana*, connection to oneself is partly produced through accessing the body. Studies have shown body awareness to improve after two to three months of consistent yoga practice.¹⁴ Body awareness pertains to both the inner landscape of one's body, or interoception, and in relation to space, or proprioception. Breath provides a means of navigating these spaces. Following the motions of one's own muscle movements, in synergy with their breath, is a way of guiding an individual towards a state of homeostasis.

There is a correlation between yoga *āsana* and an increased ability to regulate response to stress, with the vagus nerve playing a key role.¹⁵ Postures can be used that activate a parasympathetic state to support regulation of the autonomic nervous system and help bring one out of a flight or fight response. Restorative postures are known to support a down regulation of a sympathetic response by lowering heart rate, promoting muscle relaxation, and reducing anxiety.¹⁶ Activating a parasympathetic state by way of yoga *āsana* involves tapping into the body's natural ability to rest and heal. *Āsana* also has a direct impact on the autonomic nervous system in helping to reduce allostatic load,¹⁷ being able to better recover from the presence of threat or stress.

Those with prolonged exposure to trauma that occurred in childhood tend to be stuck in a hyperaroused or hypoaroused neural state. Yoga has been shown to decrease arousal physiologically, presented by reduced heart rate, lowered blood pressure, and improvement in the systems of the body that allow for flexibility when responding to stress.¹⁸ Mindful movement serves to expel stored energy and emotions, with space provided for rest and stillness between poses. Like the silence between words, these mini breaks act as opportunities for the body to integrate. The mind is also given the chance to find a place of quiet, all without moving at a pace that feels overwhelming. There entails balance of utilizing muscles of the sympathetic nervous system in a grounded and mindful way, while helping to keep one out of a freeze response with the proper incorporation of timely rest.

Along with mindful movement, working with the breath is another yoga practice that is beneficial for connecting back to oneself. Deliberately regulating one's inhales, exhales, and breath retention can help to mitigate stress and aid in calming the nervous system. As voluntary action over a normally involuntary function, breathwork or *prāṇāyāma* can influence parasympathetic states by controlling outputs from the ventral vagal complex.¹⁹ Conscious breath can essentially be used to tell the body that it is safe. Controlling the breath is a means of controlling the mind. Coming back to one's breath instantly brings the individual into the present moment. In yoga, breath acts as a key for further enhancing body awareness and regulating the nervous system. It is the link between body and mind. Modulating the breath can thus affect mental state. Conversely, states of mind also affect the breath. Becoming aware of the divine energy of *prāṇa* moving within, and throughout, one's vessel is a means of opening insight, intuitive wisdom, and modes of healing all already contained within oneself.

Safe embodiment is an important goal for the population of those experiencing C-PTSD. Many of these individuals may feel unsafe in their body because it could be associated as a storage house of trauma. Simply becoming aware of the breath may be challenging in itself as bringing attention inwards could be triggering. Breath is an implicit reminder of trauma. Noticing the breath alone can bring on a triggered response. The individual therefore may subconsciously hold the breath,

scunch and collapse the ribs to not feel themselves breathing, show paradoxical breathing, have shortened intercostal muscles, or engage in shallow breathing. Deep breathing can often be overwhelming, causing more anxiety and panic states rather than serving as a relaxation technique. It can move too much too soon. Individuals with trauma histories should be guided very gently to feel into their breath, noticing where it naturally wants to go without trying to force or change anything. They can focus on the sensation of inhaling and exhaling felt at the tips of their nostrils, taking note of the temperature of the air and the quality or pattern the breath is following. Awareness of the breath is a simple yet profound step towards coming into connection with the body.

Chest breathing is associated with anxiety and perceived danger.²⁰ A three-part yoga breath involves guiding the breath into the belly, ribs, and chest. A three-part breath may help to soothe the nervous system by incorporating diaphragmatic breathing, while also introducing more awareness to various parts of the body that an individual with experience of C-PTSD may be disconnected from. This can, in turn, be immensely triggering as well. Places of the body that keep one guarded and protected, such as the rib cage and chest, can dredge up past trauma when forced to move. Gently practicing diaphragmatic breathing creates new pathways for the breath to find its way into the belly. These new pathways are reiterated with continuous practice in such a way that new waterways will form the more a stream trickles through that newly carved path.

Inquiring deeper, another reason as to why awareness of breath can be triggering is due to the commonality of suicidal ideation with C-PTSD. Breathing is a reminder that one is alive. This can be exceptionally grounding for some, or a loud trigger for others. It can be assumed that *prāṇāyāma* must be approached with care and benevolence for this population. Attaining a belly breath can be achieved first before introducing a three-part breath. Along with an introduction to diaphragmatic breathing, a slow extended exhale can be beneficial to incorporate in a trauma-sensitive yoga session. Slowly exhaling is known to activate the parasympathetic nervous system.²¹ The heart rate also slows down and a *sattvic* state of calm can be produced. There is deliberate control in how one releases energy out into the world.

Another option for *prāṇāyāma* for those with history of complex trauma to incorporate is *ujjayi* breath, which involves a slight constriction of the throat. This creates a soft sound of the ocean, or like wind blowing through leaves, and induces a calming effect. It is known to reduce tension in the body, increase parasympathetic activity, as well as stimulate the vagus nerve.²² Focusing on the breath and associated sensations in the body are considered interoceptive processes. Interoception cultivates greater mind-body connection which is of benefit to those with C-PTSD due to dissociative symptoms. Breath brings one back to being present with themselves. The slight vibration and sound of *ujjayi* breath can further enhance this effect by providing sensory input from the body to tune into. As a bottom-up approach, breath can be used to help recalibrate the nervous system. The homeostatic response seen from practicing *prāṇāyāma* leads to autonomic control, and thus an enhancement in regulating levels of arousal.²³

Such practice can guide those with C-PTSD back to a place of centeredness. *Prāṇāyāma* exercises have shown to promote bottom-up processes that influence both nervous system function and emotional well-being.²⁴ Emotions and breath are linked through the vagus nerve. Breathing exercises can activate the ventral vagal complex which allows the individual to safely shift between autonomic states. This aids in widening the window of tolerance for a nervous system stuck in flight-fight-freeze. Breath can thus be utilized as a tool for self-regulation; having the potential to become a resource for when one gets triggered. Breath is something the individual always has with them to fall back on.

Because autonomic functioning can be controlled, breathing serves as a portal whereas sympathetic, parasympathetic, and interoceptive functions can be induced to send messages relating to how the body responds to threat. Breathwork can aid in training the autonomic nervous system to adapt more dynamically when exposed to stressors.²⁵ With their physiology on board, the individual can start to step deeper into their minds with the added security that their nervous system will be less likely to perceive this exploration as threat. This is where yoga can have a place within the therapy office. Yogic practices allow for further exploration into spaces that have not been able to be tolerated prior.

The applied yogic philosophy of *svādhyāya*, or self-reflection, is another integral part of healing. According to Pantanjali, *svādhyāya* is a piece of a three-part model reminiscent of principles of cognitive behavioral therapy, along with *pratipaksha bhāvana*, or cultivation of positive attitude, and *abhyāsa* (practice). In trauma-sensitive yoga, participants are instructed to observe themselves without judgment. Applying *svādhyāya* as an embodied philosophy brings one closer to their sense of Self.²⁶ Perspective from yogic philosophy encourages one to observe their own behavior, thoughts, and emotions. This is especially beneficial for the unique portrayal of C-PTSD in the lives of individuals. Once behaviors are recognized, *pratipaksha bhāvana* aids to change unwanted ones in the same sort of way cognitive therapy aims to do. False identities built around one's defense mechanisms, coping strategies, and victim mentality can disintegrate. It begins in awareness and follows in the attitude one has towards life and themselves. Reframing perspective is imperative for shifting from emotional reactivity to the ability to consciously respond. And, of course, it takes disciplined practice (*abhyāsa*) to reach control of mentality.

When an individual has been through prolonged trauma, their physical body can be associated with feelings of entrapment. The body is a constant reminder of the heaviness carried all these years; a warehouse of painful memories and betrayal. The practice of meditation can very well bring up awareness of raw feeling states. Being able to sit in these sensations as they arise is a spark for transformation. Somewhere beyond thoughts and beneath sensation of emotions lies an inner presence of which is the one who watches the happenings of experience.

A sort of superpower arises in the ability to observe one's internal and external worlds without reacting. The mind is allowed to settle into calm, peacefulness, and stillness whilst in *dhyāna*, or meditation.²⁷ Like a muddy stream becomes clear once the sand gets a chance to settle, so one must still the mind. Meditation presents an opportunity for finding clarity and fulfillment. Unconscious meshwork is attentively unraveled. Meditative practice has a place in therapeutic settings because it provides as a tool for managing ruminative thoughts.²⁸ Sitting in liberation while within an incarnate form, engulfment in the

trance of meditative states brings one face to face with cosmic consciousness.

Meditation aims to see the world in absence of bias, sitting as the silent witness to all experience. Such practice can also help reframe events of trauma in a similar way that cognitive processing therapy aims to achieve. Mindfulness has been shown to be beneficial in reducing symptoms of stress in those who have experienced trauma.²⁹ As a top-down regulatory approach, mindful meditation incorporates cognitive control over external stimuli. The practice works to bring acceptance to places that were formally under control of negative emotional reaction. Mindfulness based meditation has been utilized as an effective tool in psychotherapeutic treatment modalities to improve well-being and reduce symptoms related to stress disorders.³⁰ As a potential benefit for the population of those with C-PTSD, mindfulness based meditation is associated with increased vagal tone and parasympathetic response, a decrease in cortisol, lowered breathing rate, decrease in blood pressure and heart rate, and decrease in muscle tension.³¹ Effects can be seen in attention modulation, awareness of the body, and affective (emotional) regulation. These are all key challenges for those with complex trauma histories.

Studies have suggested that meditation promotes neuroplastic change in structures of the brain associated with self-regulation.³² This include relevance to the emotional limbic system and the cognitive prefrontal cortex. Communicative pathways open between creative and logical parts of the brain. Mechanisms of the brain reflect the subtle nuances of the energetic body. The capability to regulate lies in both bottom-up and top-down approaches from the control of a higher place of self-awareness. Going back to *svādhyāya*, self-awareness is an integration of pathways of experience, which culminates as a process of self-regulation.³³ Steadiness comes when soul, mind, and body work together as one system.

Meditation without a focused point of attention might be difficult for traumatized individuals. Those who have gone through trauma often have difficulty feeling safe in their bodies and experiencing true relaxation. Lying in *Śavāsana*, or corpse pose, at the end of a yoga practice is supposedly a time of total relaxation, but those who have trauma histories are often seen to experience more tension and arousal in these poses of surrender.³⁴ The muscles of the body stay

hyperactive in preparation of flight or fight. The unfamiliarity of relaxed states can sometimes feel more triggering than a perception of threat.

Dissociation is also a concern for deep states of meditation. When caught in a dissociative state, there is a disengagement from oneself. Rather than sitting silently in one spot, stranded in a landscape of dissolution, traumatized individuals can be cued to focus on parts of their body and the sensations that arise within them. Mindfulness based meditation specifically entails focused attention on the felt experience of sensations, thoughts, and emotions.³⁵ Individuals have a focused task to keep their attention. Cultivating nonjudgemental body awareness, in lieu of dissociating, would be a huge milestone for those who experience C-PTSD. Focusing on a specific body part and unambiguously feeling into the sensations is one method of bringing one out of a spiral of thinking.

The body will naturally relax as attention is being drawn to felt sensation and away from the thinking mind. This is a practice known as bodysensing. In line with mindful meditative techniques, bodysensing can help to cultivate nonjudgemental awareness. Sensations are not viewed as good or bad, but just simply are. Sitting with seemingly unpleasant sensations allows them the space to be listened to, eventually subsiding and giving way to a sense of safety in surrender to acceptance. The individual relearns how to be within their body.

There occurs a shift from reidentifying with everflowing emotions, moods, thoughts, and sensations, and coming to sit as awareness itself. Harmony trickles into places overtaken by dissonance. While engaged in meditation, with focus placed on one's breath or other sensations in the body, one is brought into the present. The yogic practice of meditation can aid in effectively bringing oneself out from emotional, somatic, or memory flashbacks. Individuals can be cued to simply observe, to not try to change any sensations nor let the mind ruminate. Their own unique wisdom will bring them to the understanding that they are not their thoughts. Self-awareness grows to the point of which one comes to sit as awareness itself.

Consciously bringing attention to the body is vital in bringing one out of a hyperaroused or dissociative state and into a place that feels comfortable within one's own internal space, though the process can of course be triggering and uncomfortable to move through. With trauma, the body becomes associated as an enemy.³⁶ Can we hold steady when

those fears, hesitations, and doubts show up? Can we stay just a little longer in these sensations and see with curiosity if the threat is actually coming from within the body, or if this is a past sensation from an external source? These questions may bring up something to process further with a psychotherapist.

Take a moment to check in with yourself. Notice how your body is positioned right now, and if it wants to move or readjust in any way. You may want to be seated, lying down, or standing. If the body is fidgeting, wiggling, or trembling in any way, feel free to further invite in those actions. If the body wants to find more of a stillness, then honour that. Notice the points of contact between your body and the surface holding you up. This may be the ground, grass, a couch or a bed. Feel into the solid support holding your weight for you. You may feel this beneath the soles of your feet, points on your back, or under the sitz bones. Feel free to tap or press against these points of connection to stable, solid support to further establish that it is firmly there.

If you have water, tea, or coffee handy, feel free to take a sip. Notice the temperature and taste. Settle back into your preferred position, making any adjustments as necessary. Begin to feel out into the environment around you. In practice, eyes can be closed or stay open, and if they are closed they can absolutely open at any time. Notice the air as it hits your skin, perhaps there is a certain temperature present. If outside, maybe you can feel the warmth of the sun, or the coolness of shade. Feel out into the space of the room you are currently in. If the eyes are closed, one would take note of any colours or textures behind the eyelids. If they are open, allow a soft gaze, and notice the colours or textures in view. Notice if there is a smell present - perhaps you have essential oils, incense, or a candle. Tune into any sounds in your environment. This can be within your room or beyond the walls. There might be the sound of a heater or air conditioner, birds chirping, or footsteps or voices in the very distance.

Allow your body to sink a bit more into the solid support beneath you. Tune into the sensation of inhaling and exhaling. You may notice the belly as it rises and falls with your breath, or perhaps stay with the breath at the very tips of the nostrils. Again notice if there is a temperature. Welcome any sensations that arise in the body. Do not try to change or fix anything. Simply notice whatever is present, from

your toes all the way up to your head. Take note of any images or memories that are present when feeling into these sensations.

Take a moment to check in with the mind. Acknowledgement what the thoughts are doing. See if you can observe them and allow them to pass on by as quickly as they arise. Allow for any noise or silence that is present. Check in with the breath again, noticing if there is a pattern, quality, or localization it is following right now. You do not have to change anything, but feel free to invite the breath to deepen if that is attainable right now. Take note of anything else that is present within your field of awareness at this moment. Then, whenever you are ready, allow your attention to release. Feel back into the solid support beneath you. You can wiggle your toes and fingers. Eyes can flutter open if they are closed while doing this practice. And, whenever you are ready, begin to orient back into this space.

This is an example of the type of grounding and orienting techniques one can start a trauma-sensitive yoga session with as well come back to multiple times throughout the session if need be. This is especially beneficial for keeping an individual present in the current moment and help to mitigate the chance of dissociation occurring. By finding external resourcing, it helps to invoke a safer atmosphere for stepping into internal resourcing. It also acts as a safety net to fall back on. Sensation of the body can be observed just like how external sounds and distractions may be listened to. Come to observe the mind in the same sort of way the body can be perceived. Slip even further into a state of pure observing.

Sitting as the observer to all happenings of experience is a stance achieved through continuous meditative practice. Meditation has shown to positively impact the mechanism of orienting³⁷ in which an individual experiencing flashback or flooding of the nervous system is able to bring themselves back to present reality. Yoga *nidra* is a meditation technique that breeds interconnectedness between self and world. It trains an individual to respond to sensation instead of abiding by instinctual fear-based reaction. Emotional self-regulation involves the integration of environment with mind and body.³⁸ Bringing unbiased awareness to felt states within the body helps to develop interoception. Feeling secure within oneself provides a medium for feeling safe in any external environment.

The part of the brain dealing with interoceptive awareness is the insula. This is where sensation of inner processes becomes interpreted within consciousness. Brain images show that traumatized individuals have decreased activity in the insula.³⁹ Yoga is known to help breed interoceptive awareness. Awareness of somatic sensations can not only bring greater insight into emotional feelings, but also aid in training the nervous system to more effectively respond to external stimuli that may be triggering by way of remaining nonjudgemental. Low affective regulation is linked with dysfunction in the limbic network, indicated by a reduction in prefrontal activity as well as exaggerated amygdala reactivity. Studies have found similarities in the places of the brain activated in both mindful meditation and affective regulation; suggesting that meditative practice can positively impact the ability to extinguish conditioned trigger responses by strengthening the functioning of the neural networks associated with signaling safety.⁴⁰ Yoga *nidra* meditation is utilized as a tool to bring one back to the state of wholeness they already innately are.

iRest, or Integrative Restoration, is a program started by co-founder of the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), Richard Miller. It acts as a variant of yoga *nidra* practice that helps to feel into the subtle vibrating life held within. iRest is integrative because it promotes healing physically, psychologically, and spiritually. It is restorative because it is said to bring one back to their true nature. Ten modules or protocols are included in iRest which include: heartfelt mission, intention, inner resource, bodysensing, breathsensing, opposite of emotions, observing of thoughts, joy, awareness, and wholeness.

The heartfelt mission is met to provide meaning. Intention provides personal guidance. One's inner resource is used to find safety. Bodysensing is for grounding, breathsensing is to connect. Switching between opposites of feelings and thoughts helps to cultivate nonjudgement. Joy serves as innate well-being, and awareness is the experience of one's wholeness.⁴¹ In this model, well-being is viewed as an inner resource. When individuals are overwhelmed, they always have this inner sense of security to return to. Symptoms of PTSD can be seen as messages. The body is working as an ally in willingly trying to process the effects of trauma.

Fear melts into curiosity. Simply noticing what is felt promotes emotional regulation. iRest involves feeling into opposites in order to come to neutrality as indifferent perfection.⁴² If a sensation of warmth is felt, the client is instructed to find a place in their body that feels cold. If something feels tense, is there a part of the body that feels at ease? What does it feel like to hold both sensations simultaneously, recognizing that sides of duality are not separate? A large component of this practice is an attitude of welcoming. In observing, the participant is able to take a step back and guide their awareness from a place of acceptance. There is a restoration of harmony within oneself by the act of listening.

The practice of meditation can help to establish emotional regulation, self-compassion, interoceptive awareness, self-regulation of the nervous system, reframing of perspective, and grounding to the present. An ultimate goal to reach for is to help those who experience the symptoms of C-PTSD to cultivate an internal, felt sense of safety. A mindful meditation such as Integrative Restoration (iRest) serves as one avenue to get to this place. The practice of iRest guides one through an atmosphere where they experience a felt sense of well-being already contained deep within them. The yogic practice provides a reminder of one's true nature, a state of complete resonance that cannot be touched or destroyed.⁴³ That is a space of internal security.

In yogic practice, one is brought closer to sense of Self; the unchanging entity of whom is experiencing all these sensations and events occurring. Rather than identifying with experiences, one comes to identify as pure experiencing in itself. There is a moving away from identification with trauma. Perspectives of metacognition emerge in which the individual can view everything they have been through in light of indifferent perfection. Living in harmony with oneself; with one's body, mind, and soul, is how to live in harmony in the world no matter the circumstance.

Challenges arising from C-PTSD may include hypervigilance, fatigue, difficulty focusing, anxiety, depression, hypersensitivity, flashbacks, alexithymia, and dissociation. Yoga incorporates body awareness in relation to affect regulation by building the ability to notice and tolerate sensations as they arise. One can come to recognize somatic responses to emotional states in order to better understand the emotion. Thus, they become more mindful when and how they are

triggered. Power is met in willingly engaging with the trigger rather than avoiding it. The mere observance of a trigger is enough. Noticing, rather than erasing, is a catalyst for positively altering one's perception of themselves.⁴⁴ What happens when we choose to face what we usually run away from? To look in the eye an identified contortion leans into coming to decipher a misconstrued belief.

Suppose the colour of a disposition is not what we thought. Sometimes, it is the lighting in which we are viewing that skews its contrast. We hold the power to flip perspective in order to shift perception, though taking care not to bypass the initially presumed experience. We need only to turn on the light and eventually we may learn to see rightly in the dark. Focusing and defocusing can be switched between, viewing everywhere without looking at anything specific. Pairing of opposites is welcomed to help promote healing by way of getting out of the thinking mind.⁴⁵ We are able to become aware of thoughts and view them from all angles.

Tolerance is built to notice sensations of the body in a similar fashion. We come to acknowledge that we are not our thoughts; we are the silent witness to them, observing from a place that lies behind thoughts. There occurs a surrender from trying to silence the darkness. Motivation breeds from self-compassion in place of self-criticism. Joy is found in the connotation of simply Being. Though not at all easy, it is quite simple. Internal world merges with surrounding externality whereas (i)llness transmits to (we)llness. An integrated wholeness can be sensed and felt intrinsically.

Trauma-sensitive yoga entails choice, resourcing, connection, acceptance, body awareness, tools for regulation, and ultimately a felt safety. Self-inquiry occurs through curiosity. Trauma survivors almost exist outside of time, in both dissociation and inclination for spiritual development. Even with finding a way to cope with living within the world, a problem entails in figuring out a way to feel safe inside oneself.⁴⁶ Lack of synchrony prevails in stepping out of tune with oneself. Rhythm can be recreated through the wave-like motion of breath, matching it with movement, or perhaps even sensing the slight quiver of stillness. From forbearing awareness ensues flow; expanding out from inspansion.

Stepping into places of the psyche in depth begins to tap into nonverbal language. With right brain associations, artistic expression

flows from deeper feeling states. Emotions act as messengers. The body holds the paintbrush for divine communication held inside. Creative compositions expressed through the body allow for reassociation from lost constellated parts.⁴⁷ Processing trauma through the plane of the body enacts a shift into being awareness. The individual faces the portrayal that they are in actuality not their trauma, but rather their trauma is contained in their awareness. Pure awareness lies as the core of identity. Each experience is like a cloud, floating in the sky of which is awareness-in-itself.

Embodied philosophy takes shape as one taps into their intuitive wisdom. That is where fertile ground lies for healing. In a session of trauma-sensitive yoga, individuals engage in practices that aim to improve self-regulation and psychological resiliency. The various therapeutic yoga techniques permit modification for the unique needs of each participant. Different practices of yoga can be effectively used to quiet the mind, promote emotional regulation, and enhance wanted behaviors.⁴⁸ Mindfulness practice brings one into present awareness. This is especially helpful for traumatized individuals who may be disconnected from themselves and their surrounding life.

The impact of traumatic experience is subjective. It cannot be logistified by objective data without dehumanizing the individual who had gone through such experience. Trauma translates into a felt visceral sense in the body. Immaterial becomes materialized through a personified form. Perhaps trauma healing is not about overcoming, but poses an act of re-coming. There is a coming into oneself, whilst willingly coming into one's trauma. Facing that which we want to run from is an esoteric task that oozes into unplumbed spaces of oneself. Externally and internally, yoga can establish a safe environment for taking such plunges into the unknown.

vi: Jungian Mysticism

“The search for reason ends at the shore of the known”

-Donald Kalsched

The original intent of psychotherapy was to explore the unconscious landscapes of the psyche in effort of making them conscious. Transpersonal psychology invites a return to the transcendent depths of human nature. Further, spaces of the unconscious involve exploration of that which is beyond ("trans") the human ("personal") experience. Soul serves as the ligament between two realms, where unconscious becomes conscious and ineffable subjective experience becomes something objective. Trauma response is like the opposite of an authentic drawing of soul.

Where physical traits are portrayed through colour and texture, psychical traits speak by way of action, depth of emotion, intuitional inclination, and thought formation. The psychic layer is the immaterial side of materiality. Outer temporal world consists of materiality and the senses. It is viewed as secular, scientific, rational, and practical. This is a world viewed with an outer eye. Seeing with one's inner eye opens into a more mysterious and perhaps uncomfortable sincerity. A stance from one's private Self provides relational ground for the external world.¹ Mystical permanence is hidden beneath an ordinary realm where soul touches God.

Therein lies an intermediate living between ego and Self, inner and outer, transcendent and mundane. Space lies between personal subjectivity and communal intersubjectivity. Imagination competes over margins with reality. Knowledge can be obtained from the senses or through intuition; the difference between interaction and coexistence.² We can intentionally put forth effort to relate out into the world around us. Another option is to stand within our own orbit amongst a shared solar system. Coexistence is found in the sole act of Being.

Ponderment ensues from curiosity to step into metaphysical places one has not wandered prior. Each step brings awareness to what was once left unaware; a path guided by shadow as the sun's glow begins to cascade behind trees. Realization emerges insofar as what appears as dissociative is really grasped as full presence. We can often find ourselves guided by forces the eyes cannot see. Within personal experience, an innate essence drives the phenomenon of subjective perception. Carl Jung's proposition of the collective unconscious establishes a framework for the deepest parts of the human psyche. In relation to the state of *samādhi* in yoga, the human psyche can be seen reflected in cosmic consciousness. The Cosmos comes to know itself through human incarnation. Contemplatively understanding oneself acts as a means of understanding the world, and vice versa.

Samādhi stands as the closest state an individual can get to intervening with the Divine whilst still within incarnation. It could be considered a mystical state by some. Mystical experience involves wholly feeling what is unseen. Mysticism has a connotation of being related to mystery, when really it is about profound clarity.³ Truth illuminates when lifting aside the veil of what is known as reality. Somewhere between objective sense perception and subjective psychological interpreting lies the transcendent. Encompassed is a space inaccessible by comprehension of the mind, beyond where rationale can reach but wholly understood by intuition. Among the transcendent, nondual nature underlies polarity.

Physicality provides accessibility for experiencing tangible forms of what contains mystic quality. Human thus stands as the living embodiment of mystical experience. We are the entire cosmos bound by skin. Jung incorporated archetypal figures in his psychology that are universal to mankind. These archetypes reach beyond complexes. They are a means of giving expression to the immaterial or unconscious. Symbolic language speaks more to what is ineffable in a similar way to how a painting conveys emotions too deep to translate into words. We may access misunderstood experiences of trauma by way of mystical didacticism.

Carl Jung can very well be considered a mystic philosopher. He presented a construct of what he called the collective unconscious, speaking to the essences and impulses common to all of humanity. In yoga, individual self or *ātman* can be said to merge with the cosmic

consciousness of *Brahman*. Submerged in a state of purely creative flow, there is uninhibited absorption in ontological truth. Where the collective unconscious is like *Brahman*, the state of *samādhi* allows for experience of *Brahman* or the collective unconscious. One circulates in flux with the process of eternal Reality. There is a becoming aware of awareness itself. Yoga provides practices for accessing states of consciousness in line with our natural state of Being. Spiritual awakening can be developed through regular practice of *samādhi*.⁴ In the case of this written project, spirituality could be understood interchangeably with mystical experience, transcendent states, intuition, soul, consciousness, or Being. Spirituality refers to personal self-exploration within pure subjectivity.

Yoga speaks to a sort of embodied philosophy whereas an individual can stand as pure awareness. The practitioner is offered the invitation to step into total unification. Yoga bridges substances of mind and body; the word itself meaning to "yoke" or "unite". We recognize balance of hot and cold, masculine and feminine, sun and moon, light and dark, and black and white. Joining these opposites together breeds not grey, but colour. Polarity joins in paradox of unity. Jung spoke of this combining of oppositional forces as a way of transcending beyond them.⁵

Duality melts into indifferent perfection of intense neutrality. There is a dissolution of ego when one comes to recognize that there is no right or wrong, good or bad, positive or negative, above or below, out or in, material or immaterial. There simply is. The baseline of intuition relies on a stance of neutrality as bliss; wholly assimilating all that is, within its own nature, without placing any conditions. The collective unconscious contains universal wisdom. It is the ocean of which we are all a drop of. It lies as the foundation of every being, cell, leaf, thought, memory, instinct, sense, and dream. All these facets swirl around in this grand collection of the deepest part of our psyche, like galaxies of sand caught in a current.

Samādhi lies as the foundation of experience; a congruent state in unlimitation.⁶ The Universe scientifically and artistically follows coherence.⁷ The word alone speaks to one song, Uni(-)verse; of which the individual could feel free to sing to in their own unique way. *Samādhi* provides space to settle into oneself. It initiates perceiving from a gradient outside of ego. Quintessence of homeostasis transpires

across all levels. The idea of the collective unconscious supports how human stands as consciousness experiencing in itself. It evaporates the illusion of duality whereas there no longer lies a boundary between self and world. Nondual awareness involves the essence of consciousness on an innermost level.⁸ From nonduality, and planes of intuition, we are then able to manifest as we please. Physical structure materializes from ethereal forms. Through mysticism we are able to make the unconscious conscious; the Universe itself speaking through material form. Polarity presents challenges when trying to find harmony in the relationship between self and world. Contradiction can be transcended by inviting in both opposing sides.⁹

The *yoga nidra* meditation technique of Integrative Restoration (iRest) utilizes observation of opposite sensation as a tool for finding a stance of intense neutrality. There is simply observing, without trying to change anything. With that comes total acceptance of exactly what is. This is similar to both the angle of seeing in phenomenology as well as mindfulness perspective in Buddhism.¹⁰ Viewing an experience with nonjudgemental awareness provides a key for slipping behind the treacheries of the mind. “The mental isn’t fractured in the universe in isolated islands, but its thoughts form an ocean of thoughts that fills the entire world.” (Ponte & Schäfer, 2013). Moving aside from judgment invites one to step closer into realms of heightened connection, as seen in *samādhi* and the collective unconscious.

Experiencing the state of *samādhi* encapsulates a journey of self-realization. The *Yoga Sutras* describes the practice as a mind divulged in contents of emptiness.¹¹ There is detachment from outer happenings. In absence of judgment, cognition, and perspective, one transcends conditioned identity. Behind thoughts, beneath sensation, and above all reason lies the true core of who we are. Transcendental experience requires insight. Exploration occurs through introspection as one comes to sit as the silent witness to all observation. The role of the witness is further strengthened in states of *samādhi*.¹² One can come to exist as pure awareness or consciousness itself without filter.

Samādhi is when an object is integrated in oneness with the observer of that object.¹³ Jung follows the notion that an individual ego is of necessity because in order to observe, we must first be observed. There needs to exist a perceiver to be able to perceive. Experience consists of the one involved in the act of experiencing, and the one

who is of witness to these happenings.¹⁴ A dichotomy arises in how one functions in an inner perceptual space while simultaneously touching an external reality. Distinction can be found between gross and subtle; the former being that which is experienced through the five senses, and the latter speaking more so to energy and vibrational feel. We can feel beyond what is portrayed in the empirical world. This reaches beyond where conceptualization by the human mind can grasp.

The yogic practice of *samādhi* broadens one's awareness of their own consciousness. Understanding comes by way of directly experiencing what is left inexpressible. In Jungian view, experience of the unconscious sparks identification with a finite ego to be replaced by the God archetype.¹⁵ The Universe lives through the human. Jungian mysticism begins in intuition. From there is manifested feeling, thought, and sensation. This process is in line with the concept of phenomenological reduction, proposed by philosopher Edmund Husserl, which can be thought of as a kind of irreduction. Rather than starting at the body and finding our way back to soul, moving from material to immaterial, we start in the state of the transcendent and manifest through levels of form until we reach the surface of which is physicality. According to Husserl, phenomena manifest in the human experience; consciousness is the beginning of derivation.¹⁶

Question arises in how substances of mind and body relate. In line with both yogic viewpoint and Jung's theory, it is proposed that an aspect of soul or intuition is what underlyingly drives the functions of mind and body in soundness of unity. Cognition, neurology, and physiology communicate on the same wavelength. Simultaneous top-down and bottom-up functioning establishes a holistic structure for processing one's lived experience. Integration thus brings mind and body into the oneness of soul.

Traditions in philosophy commonly speak to the mind-body problem. Some stances, such as that of George Berkeley's idealism, follow a monistic view where only immaterial substance exists. Materialism says that only physical conditions exist. Other postulations involve a dualistic framework of separate substances of mind and body, as seen in René Descartes' viewpoint. Yogic philosophy offers the idea of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* to help explain the relationship between the immaterial versus the material. *Samkhya* philosophy describes material *prakṛti* as consisting of the senses or *pañcendriya*, ego or *ahaṁkāra*,

mind or *mānas*, and intellect or *buddhi*.¹⁷ It includes both mind and body, the entire natural world, and functions of cognition. These are not identities but rather avenues for self-reflection.

Puruṣa is the ineffable divine quality at the base of all existence. It is the canvas from which one can create; like the black expansiveness of æther allowing for each trillionth star to shine. *Vedānta* philosophy says that Self appears to be finite due to lack of experience of it. “The Self reveals itself by itself – like the sun when the clouds are blown away” (Shetkar, 2017). We can view the sun because the sun is shining unto itself, projecting clarity in light. We come to know the Self by fully experiencing it through our own self.

One method of meeting with Self is by convening with the collective unconscious. One could think of the plethora of potential that is available to be acquired. Every action stemming from each cognitive function is held in this pool of innate essence. Getting in touch with intuition provides power in Being. Jung theorizes that conscious states emanate through forms of a cosmic realm.¹⁸ We can tap into Jung's collective unconscious by means of diving into cosmic consciousness; the human psyche emanating in reflection of galaxies, *puruṣa* speaking through a language of *prakṛti*. Experiential observation of what appears external to oneself is really a looking into oneself.

Quantum physics helps to provide a psychological explanation of the Universe. The field shows how there is an entire existence that is invisible to the eye, yet entirely real. Nothingness provides endless possibility. The Universe itself is a conscious entity. At its basis, it is non-material and manifests to consist of forms.¹⁹ The material realm arises from incorporeal essence. Jung insisted that there is a realm we are able to interact in that does not consist of materiality. Acts of behavior derive from functions of the human mind, which stem from the psychic pool of the collective unconscious. Jung's views fall in line with quantum physics which follows that material reality has an immaterial basis.²⁰ *Advaita Vedānta* nondualism also coincides with this notion in saying that the core of Being is composed of immaterial *satchitānanda*; existence, consciousness, and bliss. What appears in visible reality emanates from a cosmic backdrop.

Satchitānanda describes a subjective experience of nondual Reality. We are of the same cosmic nature. We do not have existence, contain awareness, or encounter blissfulness, but rather we are existence, we

are consciousness itself, and we are the very connotation of bliss. We can come to bask in the indifferent embrace of unconditional wholeness. One could think of the energy driving every being as universal love. This energy flows through each life form like a string of christmas lights connected by one source that allows all to shine if and only if not one is burnt out. Compassion provides a way of connecting with others in authenticity, showering all in the dialect of *satchitānanda*.

When trying to comprehend the validity of invisible realms, one could think of how imagination can create an empirically real experience. Imaginative space lies between waking and dreaming, within realms of introspection, where insight becomes personal truth and told narratives become lived.²¹ Though eyes may not see what is being spoken from one's inner world, an individual can be drawn completely into such storyboard. Imagination invites wisdom to unfold.²² Imagination can take one to places their legs could never carry them to. One's own subjective experiencing is enough evidence in itself to dictate it as real. No amount of science can speak to what is qualitatively going on intrinsically.²³ In that way, what is deemed as mystical may present as more real than perceptual reality. A mythopoetic²⁴ world lies beneath the ordinary. Language of the soul is nonordinary.

Much like Husserl's idea of intersubjectivity, quantum physics too posits an interconnectedness through all beings and things by means of connection of human mind with cosmic mind.²⁵ The physical world is a means of understanding our own vibrancy. What is stored in cosmic consciousness appears as forms within the mind. Mind interprets physical structures in an archetypal language where form translates to formless, and formless simultaneously becomes formed. Being able to see beyond the curtain of illusion that is *maya* reveals a fundamental understanding of our nature of existence. Husserl calls this process phenomenological seeing.²⁶ Perception of the mind manifests as objects within a perceptual field. By *pratyahara*, a yogic practice of withdrawal of the senses, the mind is turned away from taking on a form as objects.²⁷ Mind is thus viewed in purity without the skew of senses.

Bringing focus internally allows for seeing beyond where the eyes can see, and hearing beyond what can be formulated into words. This

is where analogy, metaphor, symbolism, archetypes, poetry, music and art all speak more than conventional language is able to say. Symbols are the transport between inner states and outer conscious awareness.²⁸ Metaphor allows for a story to be told where words fall too short. Reality forms on the basis of subjective perceptual interpretation.

Phenomenology, or the study of consciousness and experience, came to be identified as a pure subjectivity when it actually sought to transcend beyond a connotation of subject entirely.²⁹ Phenomenology stands as insight into knowledge of consciousness. Consciousness serves as a way of applying intuitive understanding.³⁰ Intuition comes from a place of nondualism. Furthermore, nondual awareness is experience of consciousness-in-itself.³¹ Sitting in *samādhi*, it is as though one can stand upon the collective unconscious as universal soil of human experience.

Practicing on the mat is a choreography of philosophical inquiry. Stepping into *samādhi* is coming into greater awareness of one's natural state of Being. Mindfulness acts as a technique for helping to modulate emotions. There is greater acceptance of exactly what is. In a way, mindfulness is paradoxically permitting the mind to be mindless. When mind becomes quiet, soul gets the chance to speak. Aligned with mindfulness and yoga, Husserl had intended transcendental phenomenology as a practice.³² Essentially, this practice is an exploration of consciousness. It is a bringing back to absolute Being, both subjective and objective and at the same time neither.

What he refers to as intersubjectivity, Husserl postulated a psychic foundation at the base of human existence, in which the only thing that separates a soul from the other is embodiment.³³ Realization of intentional interconnectedness helps one to arrive in such a space synonymous to the collective unconscious. An assemblage of experience lies beneath, and also consists of, all thoughts, emotions, memories, and personalities. Included in this assembly are traumatic events. Found within that is the inherent truth of consciousness itself.

Submerging into the collective unconscious is the ultimate form of self-development; that is the state of *samādhi*. This writer agrees with Husserl in his assertion that exploration of such realms are the very purpose of philosophy.³⁴ His transcendental phenomenology can be equated to mystical realization. In phenomenological seeing, there is

detachment from outer experience and from the biases of cognitive states in order to acquire experience of consciousness in itself. Unity is felt in both outer and inner worlds. Transcendental phenomenology opens access into hidden realms of beingness. The everyday mundane is viewed as synonymous to what is classified as mystical, divine, or sacred.

Inward contemplation is experiential, as aligned with heightened awareness states seen in yoga. One method of attaining such in yoga is called *saṁyama* which is a transformational combination of the practices of contemplation (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and realization (*samādhi*). *Saṁyama* provides a way of experiencing consciousness in itself³⁵, bringing one back to absolute Being. By tapping into more ethereal states, integrative practice of *saṁyama* portrays inherent truth of consciousness through a disentanglement of wakeful unconsciousness. In other words, making the unconscious accessible to conscious perception similarly seen in dreamscapes or mystical experience. In *samādhi*, one enters into a pure consciousness beyond sleeping and waking states.³⁶ Brain waves stay active while the body appears asleep. All that is left to observe is awareness itself.

Psychedelic medicine shows a glimpse of what it could be like to live with oneself in unalloyed connection. It ought not be relied on, but psychedelics in a therapeutic context establish a potentially safe and vulnerable container to face immense truths when used in the right setting. These sorts of altered states can similarly be attained through meditative practice by tuning into oneself in full intention. Psychedelic substances can impact one's moral foundation by disclosing a sense of sacred interconnectedness likely not felt prior. Contrarily, yoga practice entails a moral set of codes (*yamas* and *niyamas*) in which the sacredness and interconnected quality of life is already recognized and thus impacts how one chooses to live in the world of which they relate to as a reflection of Self.

While walking down the sidewalk one may feel entirely alone albeit their shadow trudging alongside them. It is not some dark entity, but a projection of their own self. The flip side to the coin they both embody, one's shadow is no less real than they are. Similar to the effects of the practice of Integrative Restoration, one comes to reside in the state of wholeness they already innately are. In looking in a mirror, we recognize we are both the reflected and the reflector. Somewhere in

the space between lies pure reflecting. Subject and object, of which are essentially no different, come to meet in this grey area where nouns become verbs, yet doing becomes a state of Being. This is our natural state.

In a place of grey lies crystalline transference between self and Universe, Universe and self; where orthogonal thinking blurs boundaries. By sinking back into fundamental core aspects of Being, as laid out in *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy, one finds themselves unfolding in cosmic connection. Assimilation is found beyond just a sum of parts. Transformative insight can only be reached through one's own exploration of consciousness. We are the Universe experiencing what it is like to be human. Cosmic consciousness reflects in each human mind like water reflecting the sun. We can be as certain of transcendental states as we are of our own existence. There lies an infinite feedback loop where output is the input. Object and subject absorb unto one another. There is no thing outside of Self.

Yoga gives a reminder of how a sorts of dance is found in stillness of metaphor. We are somehow able to visit places of resonance without stepping off the mat. Our breath transports us into direct union with the cosmic Divine. Gaze can soften as boundaries blur between where one's skin ends and the Universe begins. Jung speaks to a process of individuation as becoming undividable. It is an act of mystical magick really that we are able to exist as the entirety of creation by way of our own unique subjectivity. At the core of who we are lies this intuitive universal essence. Jung speaks of an archetype *unus mundus* in which among division betides underlying unity.³⁷ There exists one nondual world.

Cycles encompass the same circle. Day melts into night. Mind and body coexist as one. Conscious and unconscious weld into essence. *Anima* and *animus* combine in syzygy. Duality disintegrates into nondualism. Amongst cyclical force, we can sit in centeredness like the tranquility of an eye of a storm. Individual uniqueness ought not to be dismissed. Subjective experience supports the availability to read into the nature of Self. What is individually perceived often carries more weight than what is characterized as objective. The weight of gravity is no more real than the felt heaviness of grief. Even though invisible forms, they are real in one's subjective experience of them.

Human shapes meaning in their everyday experience. Their relationship to the world around them is where perspective finds an air of subjectivity. From perspective breeds introspection. Functions of mind fall deeper into intuitive contemplation. Subjectivity is a direct path to the contents of the unconscious. Likewise, the unconscious surfaces through subjectivity along that same path. Yoga can be equated to the process of individuation. Individual consciousness consists of presuppositions from the collective unconscious. The inner, more expansive layers of *ānandamaya kosha* and *vijñānamaya kosha* speak moreso to the spiritual and psychic layers of experience which can be associated with the collective unconscious. The *persona* archetype is a small droplet of this extensive, innate, and impersonal web of interconnectedness. What would it be like to step in whereas we can explore out? Jung's process of individuation is a realization of Self.³⁸ Disidentifying with shaped personality invites a coming back into unity of which is our natural state of Being. This falls in line with the intent of yoga, to unite. In-dividual, within that which is divided, entails stepping in to find a way out. A process of transformation ensues of embracing rather than escaping. Dissonance transmutes into a state of resonance.

Episodes of dissociation bring with them detachment from reality and disconnect from oneself. Sounds muffle and vision starts to blur. The being staring back in a mirror appears unrecognizable. Everything feels far away yet all too consuming at the same time. There is a moment of free floating when one lets go of what is keeping them afloat in order to grab onto what really serves. That half second moment between letting go and grasping on feels like an eternity, and we call it "life". Intuitive wisdom unfolds in Self-realization. All ceases into the boundlessness of æther. Self comes to know itself through self. A microcosmic universe is contained in each macrocosmic cell. Lying on the grass brings awareness that one is looking out into the expansiveness of space, that only the sly tug of gravity is keeping them on the side of Earth and preventing them from floating indefinitely. In gazing above, there is really a gaze towards out and beyond. In stepping in, we are able to explore out in pure experiencing.

A world exists invisible to the eye but wholly felt in experience. In dissolving to face metaphorical death, we are reminded of what it means to be alive. Bathing exhaustively in darkness reveals the

brightest light. Jumping fully into the deepest pain reveals full actualization in absence of effort. We uncover what happens when we run towards the very thing that we are most adverse to; a transformational dissolution. As Jung has said, “there I am utterly one with the world, so much a part of it that I forget all too easily who I really am” (Ponte & Shafer, 2013). Self-knowledge comes from cosmic illumination within the darkness. This is a kind of wisdom that speaks in dreams, identical to a light kindled deep within us.³⁹

When the ineffable becomes tangible, what is numinous enters into duality. In lack of psychic integration, suffering arises. Immaterial and material meet at a stand still in mistranslation. In our lived subjective experience, we stand as a conduit. Jung says that soul connects these two realms like a ligament.⁴⁰ Connecting back with the nature of one’s soul can thus allow for a transliteration to occur between inner and outer presentations.

Jung’s depth psychology reaches beyond the person, transcending the individual whilst instilling individuality. Individuality in this lens defines an absence of ego since psychic being is in conjunction with cosmic energy. Jung’s process of individuation is generally what liberation is in yogic tradition. It is the full realization of one’s Self. As a self-transcendent entity, earthling thus exists as the Cosmos in a vessel shaped like a human. The Universe itself is solely the absolute subjective experience.⁴¹

Cosmic consciousness flows through one’s crown chakra and fills each vortex channel of energy through to the base of the spine. The energy of æther takes hold as all elements come into synchronicity. Water, earth, air and fire; emotions, senses, thought, and action, harmonize as one essence of which transcends the rules of physicality. The whole of the sun, moon, trees, and rivers is contained in unity within the soul.⁴² Like an inversion of gravity, one is pulled out toward the stars as the universe within awakens; finding reverse grounding, in a sense.

vii: Opposition as Wisdom

“To confront a person with his own shadow is to show him his own light”

- Carl Jung

To come to know our own Self, we perhaps must step into the opposite. Stepping into pain is a method of coming to know God.¹ In a lot of ways trauma or behaviors associated in reaction to trauma, such as addiction, are the opposite of this wholly divine essence. They are entirely unerving to one's Being. “The path down opposition is one that leads to wisdom” (Christopher Chapple, 2022). Synergization of dialectic occurs. Tuning into that which we are not is a way of coming to that which we are. Observing the distractions of sensory experience, noticing sounds, smells and tastes, is a method of recognizing disidentification. Climbing down into layers of sensing, internal states like emotions and the thoughts of the mind can be noticed as well. Further within internal states, we come to recognize that there is someone who is observing all of these happenings. Coming closer to core essence, we realize who we are in absence of identity; a state of absolute Being that cannot be conceptualized.

Some creatures fly furthest when the moon is highest, others at the crack of dawn. A traumatized individual may feel they stand as an outcaste, a shadow blinded by night. Psychic pain becomes the main character. An invocation of curiosity keeps the individual astray to incarnate life. A raccoon is a virtuous symbol of dexterity and curiosity. The masks he wears allows for the capability of taking on various roles. An entire spectrum of uncolour is present, reflective of the world under the moonlight. Absence of colour creates space to see amongst shadows. The black and white schemed, masked raccoon is often interpreted as a burglar. Fear is readily attached to what is unknown. If one can feel around in a space the eyes see deceived, there exists immense clarity. The raccoon embodies this very notion of a deceived

perception. For him, he knows to the core of his bones that all percepts that appear as real are a screened façade overlaying an essence inexplicable by words alone. Curiosity entices one to explore hidden crevices plainly around in constancy. It is in this mystery that one sees where the eyes cannot. Wisdom starts from wonderment. In trauma uncovering and healing, curiosity plays a large role. A sense of perceptual wonderment leads to willingness to sit in the unknown. It is as though each micro moment becomes a macro moment.

Following such thought provocation as curiosity and inquiry, the field of psychoanalytic phenomenology takes root in meaning. This crossing of disciplines exists solely on a plane of subjectivity and not in materiality. Epistemological meaning is in personal subjective experience. As a facet of depth psychology, phenomenological perspectives of psychoanalysis begin to formulate synthesis of subjective and objective. Knowledge is established in reliance on personal perspective. What is perceived as true automatically becomes truth, what is perceived as real becomes reality. Subjective experience stretches beyond belief and falls back to what presently is. The only thing one can know for certain is that they are experiencing. Consciousness utilizes the human vessel to breed expression. This speaks across realms of verbiage, body language, understanding, feeling, and knowing.

Cosmic unification manifests into cognition, emotion, intellect, mentality, and physicality. In application prevalent in society, mind-body connection is addressed often in fields of philosophy and psychology. The hard problem of consciousness has left scholars stumped as to how consciousness arises from neural pathways of the brain. In yogic thought it could be said to be the other way around; consciousness is what allows for brain systems to function. Philosophers from the German idealist era too proclaim that there does exist a pure or absolute essence within innate knowledge. Teachings of transpersonal psychology say that all is a manifestation of æther, the space between stars. This fifth element is a harmonization of earth, water, fire, and air. The same theme is given in practices of astrology and tarot. Coming to a place of harmony within oneself reveals that Truth is attainable by recognizing that it is already attained. Simply breathing is enough to experience the entirety of the Cosmos.

This is a sort of wisdom only the soul knows. Minds are stuck in polarity.

Saying one is not, is not saying it is its opposite. There are infinite others between, unfathomable to thought but wholly understood by insurmountable imagination. Consciousness speaks free of restriction through image.² A blank canvas allows for infinite potential of creation. All that seems empty reveals magick in absence of appearance. Experiences with the most depth are seemingly felt directly by the soul, pulsating beneath the heaviness felt in one's bones. How does one come to chase the wind, to run after what cannot ever be caught? Required only is faith in one's own subjective experience. From there, a neverending meandering through woods of solidarity pursues. We can reach harmony by embracing disharmony. Observing both sides of polarity without allowing neither one side to sweep us into its grasp is reminiscent of walking the Buddhist path of the Middle Way. By staying centered in neutrality, one stays clear of extremes. They do not give in to either pleasure or pain. The emptiness that prevails when letting go of attachment is ontologically equivalent to an infinitum that cannot be processed by conventional perspective. We must extend our awareness to sense beyond materiality.

When trauma takes a hold, it is easy to lose sense of meaning. The philosophy of nihilism speaks to the concept of nothingness similar to the Buddhist notion of emptiness. Both are saying nothing matters, as in nothing is matter. No thing is fundamentally material. Dilemma herein develops as to where to draw distinction, if any could be drawn, between nihilist nothingness and Buddhist no-thingness. Nevertheless, the two philosophies ultimately sublimate into Beingness by way of following an existence of oblivion. What ought to be aimed after is to escape the hold of polarity and slip into a state of emptiness. Reaching for happiness is just as detrimental as reaching for sadness. One must learn to sit in neutrality, in a place of simple observance as polarities follow their continuous cycles. The way out is sitting directly centered. All then is considered to be empty. A process of healing thus begins in naturality.

Destruction brings with it the potential to create. The search for meaning in one's life often begins in the sequestered escape of mountains, whether tangibly real or metaphorical. Solitude opens more conversations than words ever could. Nature speaks in ways that

cannot be heard by one's ears. Staring into the forest is equivalent to looking at oneself. Buddhism does not establish dogma, worship, or a system of belief. The philosophy focuses on this search for Truth, bringing one's path into a tangibly lived experience where there are means with no end. Truth is that which simply is. It rules the natural and spiritual worlds, ebbing the tides and concealing the moon all whilst tugging at one's intuition.

Staying present and deliberate in each moment allows one to remain awake amongst those asleep in ignorance. Truth meets liberation. Living mindfully sparks insight into the workings of the mind; of which is reflective of seemingly external experience. We see things as they really are. We look at the trees and see ourselves. The intricate veins of leaves match patterns found on palms of hands. The stars drape a blanket of solace upon the gazer. Nature reminds us what it means to fully live out our *dharma*.

Buddhist theory spoken through the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche helps to give a redefinition to the philosophy of nihilism. Nihilism is understood to say there is no sympathy, or any virtue for that matter. However, having no sympathy is not to say possessing apathy. An entire world of grey lies between sides of opposition. The *bodhisattva* is an enlightened being who takes on the weight of human to carry alongside them, in a similar fashion that gravity carries one's weight without a thought. Extending beyond sympathy, we thus come to meet compassion. Perhaps nihilist rejection of sympathy refers back to the concept of emptiness and how nothing really matters in the end. That is not to say one should not live their life performing as little harm as possible. Sympathy involves feeling sorry for others. Compassion is loving unconditionally all humans as reflective of oneself. Love is a basic birthright, the fuel that ignites one to continue on their journey.

Teachings of Buddhism could be considered nihilistic in the concept of no-self, destroying morality.³ No-self is really in reference to lower self, or ego, which should not be confused with one's higher Self. As Self is on frequencies consistent with those of a greater metaphysical Reality, moral value does not have a place. There is no right or wrong in pure Being; there only is. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes practice while nihilist philosophy is like the seed of thought. However, both stress the process of uncovering one's path moreso than physically walking it. Such a procedure requires immense inner work; to unlearn

what was conditioned upon the individual, to reframe memories of traumatic encounters, and to train the mind to perceive the world as joyous even during the worst of moments. There ensues an act of transforming one's intentions, thoughts, actions, behavior, and demeanour.⁴

Just as Buddhism is subjective and unique to each individual practitioner, Nietzsche's philosophy stresses the establishment of morality based on what is right for each person. He said the ways to an enlightened being are knowledge and art.⁵ Knowledge is the way back to innocence, where gentle wonderment and exuberant curiosity feed one's drive to learn. Knowing what one is not, is living in the light of wisdom in a shade matching one's own heart. Authenticity is found in the aftermath of adverse experience. We remember who we are when reminded of exactly who we are not.

We all craft art in portrayal of existence. We are creatures of creation, after all. The solitary artist is often misunderstood, appearing sullen and withdrawn, when really they are submerged in the protection of equanimous mind-body connection.⁶ Art cannot possibly have a way to be wrong. Like the change of seasons, subjective experiences simply are as they are. There is no good or bad, hate or pleasure; only serene acceptance in Being and experiencing. Nihilism lays out life as a blank canvas; we can paint it however we like.

Zarathustra is a character written by Nietzsche who goes off into the mountains to seek solitude. He accumulates enough wisdom to give back to the sun and light all of the underworld. Zarathustra can be considered a *bodhisattva* in how he leaves his cave of desolation to spread teachings to his fellow humans. He says, "I want to teach men the meaning of their existence... the lightning out of the dark cloud of man." (Nietzsche, 2010, 19). The *bodhisattva* lives as a teacher, sage, and healer. They are knowers and not believers. One must go off alone to uncover themselves. The sage is they who thinks so deeply that they become thoughtless.⁷ Mind then serves as a vehicle to perceive reality in purity, rather than skew what is directly experienced within someone as something other than their own.

The aim for a *bodhisattva* is soft disposition and calm temperament. Deliberate action is done in calmness. Their actions are not just about intention or eliminating desires. They are there to act as sanctuaries for everyone around them by method of being themselves wholly. The

bodhisattva is selfless and in devotion to the cosmic Divine. They live in the world with the knowledge that the key to healing others is by healing oneself. They understand others' injuries due to their own personal scars. Part of moving through trauma uncovering is perhaps becoming a *bodhisattva* for oneself; being one's own wounded healer. Posttraumatic growth therefore emerges. Enjoying the path is better than appeasing the goal. What use is machines if their sole purpose is to be maintained?⁸ The path is one of stillness, in which to halt the operations of the machine. The mind thus sees through a film of clarity, bringing the individual to self-awakening. A calm and clear mind gives intuition the chance to be heard. Pure insight leaks into one's veins, a knowledge considered by Nietzsche to be deeper than cognitive understanding and more like intuitive knowing. Mentality plays no part in the sort of wisdom that speaks through the stars.

Wisdom unfolds in knowledge of what cannot be known. The *Bhagavad Gītā* mentions the path of *jñāna* yoga in chapters four, seven and sixteen. This path leads the intellectual yogi down a journey of contemplation and self-inquiry. Intuition screams through silence of philosophical art. The destination of *jñāna* yoga revolves toward pure intellect, obtaining knowledge of *ātman* as *Brahman*. The yogin sits in embodied liberation as the silent witness to the happenings of experience.

Buddhism explains cause and effect while nihilism seeks to escape causality. Causal reference could actually be an argument for how Buddhism is not to be considered nihilist; that meaning is derived from a previous something.⁹ But what was the origin of those somethings? And where are the ends, in pure existence of means? It could be contemplated whether phenomena can truly be pure or if all is a product of result. Nietzsche does speak to eternal re-happenings, which could be similar to Buddhist causality and cycles of *saṃsāra*. Though the Universe appears to be enduring, it could just be repeating itself again and again, and is thus prevailing an infinite number of times. Various realms are coexistent upon the human experience on levels of body, mind, and soul. Human is predisposed to look out. One ought to seek the guidance to maneuver within instead.¹⁰ Such is like being stuck inside a fish bowl, where one looks out and thinks to see the ocean when really they are concealed in glass. Only those from the outside looking in could decipher a barrier.

When taking a step back from reality, we enter into a plane of lived fantasy. The foundation of different realms originates in imagination.¹¹ One fabricates reality to their own accord. They may step into other worlds by way of mind. The dreamscape is the origin of metaphysical reality, a place where soul and body are truly united as one astral essence.¹² Both the seen and unseen are empty and therefore identical.

True Self reaches beyond ordinary experience. We cannot name the Self, but only what it is not. Attributes dissolve entirely when one comes into their true form. Self is absolute consciousness, an identity that cannot be identified. Material disintegrates into immaterial, what is empirical dwindles down to essence, *a posteriori* becomes *a priori*, and reality vanishes into Reality. In philosophy, the theory of the dialectic is a method whereas two contradictory sides come together to breed something anew which cannot be formed otherwise. A dialectic can be said to withstand between ego and Self. Sides of opposition leads one to a place of spiritual understanding. Embracing polarity is how to eventually come to transcend beyond it.

Nietzsche says there are nought opposites but preliminaries.¹³ What is empty is containing of no relative; it is essentially essenceless. There are no characteristics to put to it. Essence cannot be fabricated since it is unconditional, or without conditions. At the same time, essence is the foundation for building existence. That which exists only can exist relatively. Emptiness does not matter if relative or not because it can only be related to its own self.

Buddhism and nihilism are both no stranger to systems of paradox. Rationality becomes limiting insofar as reasoning lacks the ability to comprehend what is beyond comprehension. Cognition is bound by polarity; we think in terms of what something is not. The mind can be both liberating and imprisoning. Ultimately there is no difference in realms because there is no duality. Fabrication trickles across different levels of existence but in the grand scheme, nothing matters since everything is true. Words fall short when conveying Truth. All is not itself nor not its negation. What is Absolute cannot be attributed. What is seen out there with one's eyes is actually all contained within, seen from a place behind eyes.

What is empty is neither no thing or some thing. Physical reality fizzles out whereas surroundings become energy lines and empty borders. Where no thing exists, everything is. The matrix breaks apart.

Perceived objects are sensed as waves of essence; fragments of free imagination. There are no real objects per se. Without an observer, there is truly nothing to be observed. This is how we create as creators or architects; we formulate a means of experience by creating percepts to perceive. In other words, the Cosmos are brought into a manifest form in and through us. We are merely interacting with a world we forgot we created. "The creator wished to look away from himself; so he created the world." (Nietzsche, 1910, 28). If all is truly empty, or *Śūnyatā*, there is no "is" and also no cessation.¹⁴ Without attributes, the phrase simply ends at "I am" without saying I am something. I is, and is not, the am.

Experience is constructed upon delusion.¹⁵ Rather than figuring out what is right, we can set all aside completely. We may live in the fullness of thought and the elaborate colours of imagination. Human has free will in the way they chooses to react. Responsibility entails the ability to respond. According to Buddhist technique, the way we react is often due to pattern of past tendency.¹⁶ We have the power to reshape how we look at situations; especially in moments of vulnerability. To understand the world, we must understand ourselves. To understand ourselves is to understand the world. Awakening lies in fully understanding human experience in order to transcend it.

Something mysteriously congruent happens when we step directly into that we wish to escape. The best way to understand the human experience is simply by living it, trauma and all. Shadow of trauma illuminates light at its core. With knowledge though comes sorrow.¹⁷ When we discover Truth we have but no choice than to drop belief entirely, losing a façade of a safety net to free fall into an abyss of heart. Perhaps human steps into hopelessness to come to understand hope. Approach with pleasant disappointment and you will almost always be pleasantly surprised. Gloominess can be highly protective. One meets a sort of comfort in melancholia; for the grey and misty days provide more opportunity for creating consolation than the overtly sunny. Cathartic apprehension follows superliminal perception.

Transformation is synonymous to the process of death. It is a way to step into other realities while still within incarnation. Nietzsche defines death as the forward movement towards wisdom.¹⁸ Fully engulfed in psyche, we are no longer held by the ties of physicality. Clinging to life is sometimes worse than hoping for death. To die readily is to fall

asleep whilst awake; to see unto dark with eyes wide open. Darkness is a prerequisite to seeing. One can merely step a foot where they so please when free from the bounds of skin. Self awakening involves a phenomenological destruction of all we thought we knew. Insight breaks apart appearance.¹⁹ Transformation happens through inquiry, an act of exploration to research into the word. Phenomenology leads to an increased level of self-awareness. Contemplating the role of consciousness naturally questions one's own nature.

One can reach into where they think the thoughtless. The wanderer free from intellectual slavery is permitted to observe in joy, without holding any attachments.²⁰ We come to recognize ourselves as experience-in-itself. As they who are wise, the shadows of light seem to illuminate surrounding entities moreso than the source itself. We build ourselves up in order to shine a path for others. We live as circumnavigators of humanity,²¹ existing both within and without, below and above, penetrating through everything and dissolving from nothing.

Deception leads to Truth, as vanity is necessary for this process. Stepping out from the physical body entails a silence that feels known beyond familiarity. Somewhere behind thoughts and above all reason lies the real you, the silent witness to all the happenings of experience. In death one cannot create beyond what they conceptualize as self.²² One treads fully into the inert creative Self. So as the body is encased in skin, the soul is encased in vanity.²³ As Nietzsche would agree, the day is almost worse than night. The sun blinds starlight. There is a reason the stars only shine on black canvas. It is with eyes closed shut when one sees clearly. Intuitive wisdom is bred in dark silence. We exist as the perceiving, behind where there is no perceiver and nothing to perceive. There is only the process of perceiving; no thought or thinker, no seer or seen, but only thinking and seeing. This stance is found when duality dissolves. Expanding one's frame of thought beyond any belief system opens an opportunity to be amongst the world in a place beneath illusion.

Rather than saying Buddhist discourse takes on a nihilist approach, it ought to be argued for the other way around – in which nihilism is a direct connotation of Buddhism. Nihilism is like the negation contained within Buddhism. Both could make the claim that there is no God; God is dead for They reside in the life of human. Once named, he is

annihilated. What is purely Absolute is ineffable. Paradoxically existing as nonexistence diminishes the mirage of self and moral value. Where trauma wipes away concept of self, it thus opens up space for spiritual awakening. One must strive to live by right virtue, but ultimately every human is on a path. The cycles of *samsāra* can already be viewed as liberation dependent on how one chooses to walk their life. In the end, it matters not; it has not matter. Such confiding is one only the stars themselves would partake in. If human were to look upon the night sky as a mirror of their own Self, all would walk in Buddhahood.

Buddhism and nihilism are two philosophical systems that speak to transformation. The reason to bring up transformative power is in effect to look past illusion by means of stepping directly into it. One could think of the metaphor of a caterpillar creating for itself the dark entrapment of a cocoon, for the purpose to disintegrate into goo and metamorphosize into a beingness where they can then flutter upon endless skies. Like soil for a seed, darkness serves as fertile ground for tremendous regeneration. Events of trauma open space for little deaths to transform into rebirth.

When moments of darkness come, it sets conditions for one to shine again. The world needs to be dark because we ourselves are a source of light. It would not be possible to shine if conditions were already bright. Moments of difficulty may therefore be appreciated moreso than pleasure - we are there given the chance to show ourselves. We cannot uncloak under the blinding sun; it is under the moonlight we are released. Who was to value butterflies over moths, or birds over bats? Some come alive at night. It cannot be fully explained why mystery brings the most clarity. The shade of mythopoetic language brings light to human. Colours arise in the present from places of murkiness in the past.²⁴ An embodied transformative phenomenology culminates in existential conversion. In Husserlian terms, there is a returning back to things in themselves.²⁵ As internal spaciousness gives rise to cognitive processes, past experiences are backlighting for the present.

Beyond past and future, transcendental phenomenology begins to theorize what lies beyond conception. Husserl's theorization says that external reality is reflective of inner subjective experience.²⁶ Percepts, or that which are perceived, are thus extensions of consciousness by the mind. The materialist view of physicalism asserts that only physical

states exist. There is a scenario in philosophy that disproves this theory by introducing the notion of qualia, or lived internal experience. The scenario involves what philosopher David Chalmers calls philosophical zombies. These beings are existentially what a human would be like if they did not possess qualia. A zombie is a human without a soul. They go through the motions of life without actually living it.

Subjective experience is what gives meaning to one's life. This is where intuition and a sense of spirituality are housed. Behind physical states, there subsists an intrinsic psychic quality to experiencing. Going deeper into this vortex is where yoga begins and ends at. Philosophical zombies help to develop the given definition of yoga because it explains cosmic experience in its place within human nature. Without an energy of the Cosmos running through intuition, we would solely be a system of mechanics. This brings up the argument of the hard problem of consciousness. An explanatory gap is formed in how physical attributes could give rise to felt experience. Yoga philosophy would say it is the other way around, in which internal experience is what allows for perception of physical states. Knowledge arises in what one experiences for themselves - whether in the presence of external happenings or the more concealed intuitive involvement.

Absolute knowledge is mentioned in the branch of philosophy on phenomenology. This is the Self knowing itself, the unreality of reality, thus developing oneself into a self-realized entity. Percepts disintegrate when perceiver comes into heightened awareness. All that exists is the bridge between: the act of perceiving. This sort of principle is also mentioned throughout psychology such as in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-realization being the highest or final step in finding fulfillment in one's life. Self-consciousness is indeed an act of yoga where duality joins in nonduality; a disintegration into pure integration.

In a journey of pursuing self-realization, pain is inherently unfavorable to achieving much progress.²⁷ At the same time, working through it teaches one how to be human. Trauma itself is a process of stepping into affliction. Pain creates a suspension between being and knowing. Mindfulness-based stress reduction could help to reduce the knowing-doing gap.²⁸ Knowing what one is not is a method of knowing who one is. Incorporating exercises such as breathwork and body scans aid to slip into a state of observance wherein the nervous system is within a regulated state of the window of tolerance. Authenticity

radiates to the point of which there lies no difference between doing or knowing states. Movement is found in stillness, and a still point is acquired amidst momentum. Intuition becomes something tangibly lived by.

The language of the soul is a silent one wholly understood by intuition. This can include metaphor, allegory, painting, art, music, or poetry. *Jñāna* yoga follows a language of knowledge as creative art rather than logical reason seen in traditional intellectual pursuits. Art is the embodiment of infinity.²⁹ We come to understand ethereal states through creative expression. Creative energy is what brings about existence. We exist as creatures of creation, formulating a world in such way a computer would program a system. Our creations reflect our own intentions. In that way, even the formless can have direction. Things are assigned meaning through intention. If no thing is intended, there is nothing to tend to.

Art speaks intention through absence of word. The artist is perpetually sad. Imaginative inspiration provides more joy than living out in the presence of the real world. Unless, of course, there is a way to make reality match the world of imagination rather than having to bring one's imagination out into the world. It is hard to say if melancholy takes a hold of artists, or if people are destined to become artists through melancholic states.³⁰ There are deep feeling states accessed by way of only the arts. "Art makes the aspect of life endurable by throwing over it the veil of obscure thought." (Nietzsche, 1910). Nonetheless, art provides a way out from personal crisis.³¹ In times when we are completely alone our creativity is all we have left. It reminds us how there is beauty to be found even in the darkest of shadow. A passageway of flow unveils in creative expression, trailing in wave-like motion with one's own energy. The artist lives in a purely subjective world. Imagination sometimes seems closer to real than does reality.

In language of art, appearance speaks in plentitude to internal states. What can ultimately be known is the knowledge that there is nothing to know. *Jñāna* or *buddhi* yoga is essentially the unfolding of *ātman*, a service to understanding Self. It is a passage leading to self-realization. The inactive act of acquiring wisdom allows the drape of illusion to fall. Encased in sparks of individuality lies ultimate Truth in a pursuit of intellect. *Jñāna* yoga is thus a path of transcendental

wisdom. Phenomenal consciousness creates an introspective feeling. And what is not seen by the eyes often holds more impact than what the human mind could comprehend. An entire realm of infinitum lies just beneath where conceptualization could reach. It is there one could come to uncover not only the true nature of existence, but of their very self as well.

Jumping fully into the higher mind of intellect paradoxically allows one to fall, to be caught in a net held by soul. The ghost of one's essence travels while the mind remains unwavering. A path reveals, in meandering luminosity, leading straight back to oneself. Time spent as lost was really an active process of retrieval. Walking through barren woods was the whole intent from the start. And with each footstep, leaves begin to appear from sprouting buds.

viii: Behind Stars

"I am a forest, and a night of dark trees: but he who is not afraid of my darkness, will find banks full of roses under my cypresses."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Upon submersion in deep delta and theta waves of meditation, the meditator awakens into still darkness. Eyes flutter open only to tell they are not needed in order to see. Bestowed before oneself is a forsaken landscape of infinite potential, drawing out specks of light on a canvas of black. One finds themselves amongst the stars. The loneliness of outer space correlates to the wholeness within Being. Like a cup empty of water, one is entirely filled with air; a simple shift of perspective reveals opportunity in creation. The meditator meets what has always been there waiting patiently for their willing attention. Breath of love flows through veins as the Universe breathes into a vessel shaped like human.

In the midst of letting go, we grasp for one moment more. All then begins to fragment and fade out as perception dissolves into the Absolute. Moving across cosmic night sky, enveloped by starlight, the thin fringe of skin draws out into the boundaries of atmospheres. All without moving a step, there is no longer a line between the Universe and what was once human form. Breathing again, deeply into her essence, there comes an opportunity to travel beyond past and future in a coinciding instant. One comes to exist in nonexistence.

Intuition conversates with Spirit in cosmic dialogue. The ineffability of this transpiration is what makes it so meaningful; to feel in Truth such moments created specially for the individual to encounter. Transcendental idiosyncrasies certainly do not fall into categories of logic or conceptualization. When body and mind are still, the soul gets a chance to be heard. Stillness follows an act of silence, speaking like the spaces between words. Oftentimes what is found spoken in silence

is more profound than what is heard by one's ears.¹ The transcendental nature experienced in yogic practice is a direct appearance of the cosmos through the individual.

The *Upaniṣads* introduce the school of *Advaita Vedānta*, a philosophical framework in Hinduism that follows a type of extreme immaterialism. It asserts essentials of *ātman* and *Brahman*, the lower self and the greater metaphysical Reality. These attributes do not exist in material form. There is one eternal essence that lives as set forth by nondualism. This cosmic essence manifests into entities that do not exist beyond an illusory state. *Brahman* is concealed by that which appears in the phenomenal world. The tenth book of the *Upaniṣads* focuses on metaphysical existence on a transcendent plane. Ten is a number representative of completion, and this book of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* speaks to the unity of mind, body, and soul as a cosmic whole. Prominent themes in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* include the notion of *ātman* as *Brahman*, and the transformation of darkness into light.

The presumption of nonduality in *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy consists of a single universal essence of which is the underlying source of All. Self is the ineffable *Brahman*. *Ātman* is identical to a greater metaphysical Reality, *Brahman*; *aham brahma asmi*.² The surface of body, mind, and consciousness float out to the inner world where soul is in direct connection with Self or Spirit.³ Yoga allows a reaching beyond oneself as an act of stepping into one's Self. This is done through a plethora of methods since experience alone is subjectively valid. The individual interprets only from their own perspective. Personal interaction thus takes a unique design. Along with the paths of yoga mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gītā* of *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna*, other methods of yogic practice include meditation, postural movement, reciting *mantra*, and breath control. The active inaction of meditative absorption is present even throughout movement. The chambers of the soul remain hidden in mystery waiting to be explored by means of silent spectating.⁴ Yoga invites one to step into the role of the observer, bearing witness to all that is present within one's awareness.

Grouped into the material realm is that which can be named. Even the soul, though a direct facet of the cosmic Divine, is seemingly put along with the physical body and the mind in *Vedānta*. Held is a metaphysical inquiry of where, and when, does the soul precisely step

in? Subjective self translates into cosmic consciousness through a frequency of union. The point of which something steps beyond matter is in interest for this written work. This is the point of stillness as practiced in a yogic path; a place where tangible form dissipates back into ineffability. A question comes into concern of how something a part of matter is able to perceive, and exist as, what stands outside of matter? The problem is also the solution; the creature is the epitome of creation. Slipping into connection with higher Self detonates the need for questioning. All just simply is as it is. However, questioning proves to provide a valuable route for being led down to a state that is indubitable. Curiosity sparks insight.

Philosophical inquiry that touches upon immaterial substance aids in grasping the essence of yoga as an art of cosmic unification. Transcendental perspectives on nature and Being deal with areas of metaphysics and phenomenology. Metaphysical theory of Being says that transcendental Reality is the same as reality of Self. This is in line with *Advaita* view that *Brahman* is *ātman*. When subject becomes one with itself as both thinker and the thing that is thought, it is referred to as Absolute knowledge.⁵ Objects of perception melt as one with the perceiver. Phenomenology is reliant on subjectivity in that a perceiver is needed in order to be able to perceive.⁶ Immersed in the practice of yoga, we are in essence the act or quality of *perceiving*. We are able to stand on middle ground between realms of subject – object relation.

Advaita Vedānta indirectly argues against physicalism without denying its nature. Physical states can be said to exist, but only on a surface level of which is an illusion. The physical world holds itself like a dream. It is a curtain draped over Reality. Self, *ātman*, is the individualized form of *Brahman*; greater metaphysical Reality. Living in a vessel of duality while as a spiritual essence is possible by means of emptiness. “I” is used not to refer to ego but to the immaterial inward self, similar to *ātman*. The intangible realm of intuition and idealism are what bring forth life. It is the invisible within the visible that is real.

The Cosmos take on a manifest form in an attempt to learn about themselves. Absolute Being is transcendental by nature but is compacted into a subjective framework.⁷ Ultimate existence or Truth, *sat*, is already a constant prevalence. Truth is as effortless as awareness itself.⁸ We come to meet Truth simply by breathing; a vital component of yogic practice. Exhaling is equivalent to expressing our Truth out into

the world (Lori Fazzio, 2022). Consciousness, *chit*, is encompassed by higher intellect of intuition and does not end within mental states. Absolute or cosmic consciousness is pure awareness. *Ānanda*, or bliss, is the natural frequency nature is tuned to. Like the Universe itself, human also animates these qualities in existence.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's idea of an Over-soul is like the all encompassing *Brahman*. Eternal interconnectedness prevails through all. The Over-soul is conceivably the opposite of a philosophical zombie. The Cosmos reveals itself within us and our interactions.⁹ True ethos of existence is an immaterial state of Being. Aspects such as individualism, intuition, introversion, and self-reliance are stressed in Emerson's transcendentalist thought. The same are seen emphasized in the yoga practitioner. Within practice, the yogi is able to emanate their pure light; the same radiance that fuels the sun and stars to shine.

What is portrayed out into the world can be difficult to assimilate as eternal. Albeit buried in illusion, inner Being is distinct from outer personality or ego.¹⁰ This can be brought further into betiding metaphorically for inner and outer worlds; true Reality being like the inner soul of physicality. A potential issue of nondualism is threatening to erase the subject by engulfing them in an absolute object.¹¹ We as subjects do not exist apart from *Brahman* or cosmic consciousness, yet we do seemingly have distinctive personalities and individual forms. Our bodies merely serve as vessels housing the Cosmos within it.

We are each candles holding flame from the same fire duplicated an infinite amount of times. Manifestation is a trickling out of the same cosmic pool. Things cannot be broken down into parts because they do not contain any parts.¹² We begin in a state already whole. Though it is not possible to entirely reside in pure consciousness while still within an incarnate form, it is possible to experience states of cosmic consciousness that underlie human functions. Bridging realms is done by falling back into the threshold of emptiness from which they appear. Yoga technique occupies this liminal space, and stillness is the key to get there.

Integrative medicine perhaps stems from these same sort of yogic viewpoints. Psychospiritual approaches incorporate body, mind, and soul as a holistic entity. Yoga meets psychology in a transpersonal lens. Carl Jung's system of thought draws in spiritual and mystical dimensions to the field of psychology. It follows the ideal that human

behavior is guided by the cosmos. Emotion, sensation, thought, and action are all derivative particles of an ultimate Reality that correspond with the elements water, earth, air, and fire, respectively. The Over-soul is like the unity of these elements.¹³ Yoga involves a process of transforming ego through a sacrifice to the Cosmos. This is not done so as a means of escape. Ego and soul interact in Jung's psychological discourse, drawing insight from the muddling of the collective unconscious.¹⁴ The soul is the vehicle of psychic awareness that translates invisibility into a reality projected through the ego.

The position of panpsychism says intrinsic entities of nature contain an aspect of consciousness.¹⁵ Nature at its core does not consist of entities; *satchitānanda* is immaterial and undefinable. In line with cosmopsychic view, perspective of transcendental phenomenology asserts that absolute essence is the Universe itself which manifests as the subjective self, "I". There is a discrepancy in panpsychism in saying that consciousness exists within all things. Through a yogic standpoint, all things *are* consciousness, and not containing of it. Consciousness therefore does not evade materiality but is the underlying fluidity allowing material form to exist.

Possessing a point of view notes a subject from an object. Individual perspective cannot be combined, therefore subjects cannot be combined.¹⁶ But what if there is no thing to combine because nothing is essentially separate? We do not stand alone as parts, but as individual wholes to the same existence. The natural world, humanity included, is an integral element of the great ocean of consciousness. And according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, this ocean runs on love.¹⁷ Yoga invites us to swim within such bliss. Love exuberates from expression of Truth.

Expressing one's Truth, from a core of innate creative nature, is an artform in itself. The artist creates based on their own interpretation of life influences. It is their Truth manifested, of which others draw their personally subjective meaning from. They are perceiving one interpretation of perception from eyes outside of their own. However, the observer's view can often be quite off from the original intention of the artist. Art speaks to what cannot be spoken. What is seen in art is Truth through illusion. Even in analogy and metaphor there is a failing to put into tangible feeling what it is like to *experience*. Herein lies the hard problem of consciousness. Misinterpretation accrues between subject and object.

Panpsychism presents intrinsic qualities as apparent without actually explaining how manifest forms arise to having consciousness. It is because this theoretical thinking is being done backwards; it is the consciousness that allows manifestation to occur and not the other way around. Yoga achieves to dis-solve the hard problem of consciousness, where subject meets object, by showing that there is no problem to begin with. Being works through levels of soul -> mind -> body, rather than body up. We are complete when grasping all levels simultaneously.¹⁸ Unification in Spirit is how subject and object merge as the same non-entity. The philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel describes the circumstance of a dialectic where two opposing sides come together in sublation. Sitting beyond human frame of mind is a self-consciousness of which transcends its balancing factors. Soul communicates with Spirit in sublime tranquility. Harmonized polar forces sublimate into something transcendently brand new. It is a bringing of oneself back to Self.

The yogic path is a sacred journey in relation to personal development, healing, connection with Self, and nature of Being. A psychospiritual approach therefore heals what is somaticized in the physical body. The experiencing state that yoga leads to is especially vital for those suffering from the mal effects of trauma, psychiatric illness, or dis-ease. The whole Universe is contained in the heart, begging to be shattered to release its contents in Divine union.¹⁹ Breaking down barriers may at first feel painful as defense mechanisms are challenged. One's shadow side shows distrust in receiving unconditional love.

Yoga leads one down a path to harmony with cosmic consciousness. In this state the individual uncovers what it means to be Home; holistically encompassing soul, mind, and body as Spirit. Unification with cosmic Self sparks compassion, humility, curiosity, hope, gratitude, and courage.²⁰ Residing in resonating frequencies generates well health for human and Earth alike. Interconnected subjects float in one intrinsic medium of an ocean of consciousness.²¹ The inner state of stillness is what allows experience of consciousness to occur. Connecting within is connective with-out.

It is a form of art to bring the stars into Earthly embodiment and to bring the earthling out to the Cosmos. Through the path of yoga, one can recognize what lies behind the stars as reflected in their own

intrinsic observing state. This state of observance is where healing can be found through experiences of complex trauma. Sitting as the observer opens an individual up for acceptance. Recognizing that one is not their trauma but that trauma stands as an experience within their field of awareness may provide a profound shift into receiving, without bypassing what the individual had gone through.

Yoga is lived as an applied metaphysics in cosmic light. This discipline of Being combines influence from fields of Hindu theology, transcendental philosophy, and transpersonal psychology. Yoga is both a noun and a verb – it is the bridge and the process of walking across it. As so, yoga brings one to a state of union with cosmic consciousness of which is correlative to their own Self. Awareness of human nature as the Universe is the ultimate Truth. Dropping the curtain of delusion unveils unity and a catalyzing wholeness, revealing there is nothing to heal because one is already complete within cosmic consciousness, dancing to the one song that is the Uni(-)verse.

Illusion of separation blocks one from fully living their Truth. What may it look like to walk around in full embeignment of all facets of one's *ātman*, to stand as a direct reflection of the cosmic Divine? We too often forget who we really are. Focus is drawn to what can easily be perceived by physical senses, dismissing that an infinite realm of sensory experience extends beneath and beyond where five labeled senses could ever reach. One could think of what it feels like to hold the image of a loved one in mere thought, the awe-ful homesickness that transpires while gazing upon clear starry sky, or the fernweh felt in the depths of one's bones when hiking atop an ocean of mountains. The sight of beauty brings with it a longing. We too often forget who we are.

Starting from states of the infinite, a phenomenological reduction occurs whereas the Cosmos are drawn down to mundane existence. Beginning at the core of Being is this notion of spirituality; a pure subjectivity, an intuitive wisdom that only a language of silence could know. From there a trickling occurs into higher reason and knowledge of embodied wisdom, encompassing such notions of *buddhi* and *jñāna*. From an intellectual sphere, manifested are cognitive operations of *manas*. This involves functions of perception, emotional processing, wakefulness, imagination, memory, logic, and thought. From there are manifested behavior, action, and physical sensation. We radiate

amongst the world from levels of spirituality, intuition, psyche, mind, energy, and body. We come to land in manifest form, from a place of the formless unmanifest.

The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo encapsulates a process of involution rather than evolution. Rising above is really a settling within. Such is an unfolding of Self; the whole of the Universe speaking through each individual life form. Integral yoga follows the same core principles of *Advaita Vedānta* nondualism where the base of all Being are these notions of *satchitānanda*; Truth as absolute subjectivity, consciousness as pure awareness in-itself, and bliss as a lived love that strings all life force together. Return to Self is an individualized process of which has profound intersubjective effects. It is the same principle of how the ocean allows for the formation of waves, while each wave is in itself the entire ocean. Compassion is the medicine needed to mend the wounds of separation.

To integrate aspects of body and mind back with soul can be said to be the goal of integral yoga.²² All stands as yoga; connection in intense neutrality between and amongst realms of polarity. Subliminal meets supraliminal, light and shadow merge as one and the same, physical learns to speak a language of spiritual, as Spirit allows for expression of universal oneness through levels of Being. Individuals live yoga as union of *ātman* with *Brahman*; solitary soul uniting with universal Reality. Integral yoga serves as a method of attaining liberation by falling in absorption of awareness as awareness itself. One could follow this notion of sitting within a state of "I am", coming to drop into just "I", and thereof dropping the stance entirely to sit in pure Being.

Conventional language falls too short to convey the state of simply Being. It is synonymous to trying to describe what it may be like to crawl up into clouds only to find one had sunk to the bottom of the sea. The only constant is that somehow in the absence of air, we are able to breathe. Waking life is equivalent to a walk home, following a north star of our own soul. Integral yoga in this case is an act of remembrance. There is nowhere to ascend to because one is already in a state of ascension. There cannot be wholeness to be found because one is already whole. Perhaps the shadow of adversity is all one sees due to the premise that they stand as the very epiphany of light. How dreary a world would be if consumed by nothing but light of the sun, for stars would never get the chance to peek their way through a cloth

of perpetual darkness. One may even begin to wonder what lies behind the stars.

Integral yoga fails the moment it is attempted to be understood. We need not understand what is ingrained in our bones; we can simply live it. To walk as consciousness is no easy task. It is as if limbo could be put into an experiential formulation. We must learn to step on subtle ground, to dance across galactic dust masquerading as soil. How beautiful it is though to look out and see wholly within. Nature gives a glimpse of the intricacies of our own soul. An entire universe exists within that portrays itself in an infinitum of facets and layers. Compassion is bred in recognizing that all is reflection of Self. As perspective is unmeshed, harmony comes into residency.

It could be imagined that the back sides of stars glow a silver grey.

ix: Plutonian Journey

When a land is left fallow or a forest burns down to impotency, conditions are then favorable for restoration. Creation is an exemplar of trust and resiliency. Treasurable lessons are repeatedly taught on what it means to be alive. Looking out at the world, in meters of destruction and preservation, equates to viewing oneself. Nature provides a means of co-regulation. Hanging from the sturdiness of tree branches allows for weight to fall to gravity. Lying in the grass blurs boundaries where the physical body seems to sink into Earth's softness while the energetic body escapes out into the sky. Leaves wave in hello to all who meander within their gaze. The ground gives reminder of stability and support; roots interconnected far beneath the soil. The smell of freshly fallen rain is like a shower for the soul. Dew droplets show to those who rise early, casting the world in quiet refreshment until the day fully wakes. Just as waves ebb and flow, so do our emotional rhythms.

Embers pull apart darkness as they break away from their source of flame. Messages resonate in the sounds of crackling and popping. Warmth penetrates through the surrounding air in an emanating glow. Fire, like the sun, is the epitome of creation. What once was burnt to rubble becomes breeding ground for new life. Perspective shines in places that were otherwise dark. Awareness follows from past ignorance. Living tenacity rages through each swaying flame, containing the power to mend a forest or completely destroy it. Though able to replicate itself an infinite number of times, every fire stands as a unique entity in its own inheritance. The whole sun is reflected in each flame.

Light seeps into spaces of the sky. Colours overarch the horizon as reflective of Earth's moods through weather patterns. The sky is filled to the brim with unsettled particles. Immateriality creates figures that can be perceived in a way that is beyond seeing. When looking at a sunset, it is not only perceived, but also experienced. Sight of the

formless fills one with ebullency. Vaporous appearance brings with it a density. The element of air is so entirely empty that it overflows in fullness.

When all elements come together in harmony, they form *ākāśa* or æther. Harmonized space within the heart is the same as that within the Cosmos.¹ For a star to be born, a nebula must collapse unto itself. A process of implosion is of necessity in order to metamorphosize. Once things are broken down they can then be put back together in any potentiality. A bringing into resonance describes the very process of death. Such is an act of transformation, in a seemingly perceived ending. Within realms matched with infinity, endings are merely new beginnings. Death is ultimately a coming together into harmony.

The aftermath of adversity brings with it a grave understanding of fortitude. Prolonged psychological distress is a bane lived experience for those who experience Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Reclaiming embodiment is done so through destruction in order to find creation. In astrology, Pluto is known as the planet of transformation. It is all about taking darkness and transmuting it into light. Healing through C-PTSD entails a process of self-transformation. Power spills into places left stripped by trauma. Though an individual is able to withstand tremendous sorrow, it is often difficult to willingly sit within the weight of grief.

Little deaths are experienced quite frequently – the loss of a job, moving to a new apartment or country, graduating, replacing old clothes, adopting new philosophical inquiries, painting in a different style, etc. Sometimes death comes and rips the ground out beneath one's feet in unexpected tragedy. All present as opportunities to step into the unknown. There, we may perhaps discover we have been treading along out of tune. Metamorphosis shapes us into notes of perfect pitch, all in tune with the cosmic Divine. Transitional periods land us right where we are meant to be.

In ways, experiences of trauma portray these moments of death. Not only do they require a process of bereavement, they also provide substance for sagaciously embodied transformation. Each moment between inhalation and exhalation may be approached as a micro death in the same manner.² Breath is a force of creation. It gives revelatory expression to unrevealed mythopoetic platforms. A fluid exchange occurs betwixt what could be seen and what is wholly felt.

Death acts as a descent whereas reaching up results in settling down into oneself. Exploration unto formlessness requires a surrender to curiosity. As a moving across forms, transformation involves embarking on a journey through dark crevices in order to come to know light.

Letting perspective broaden gives permission for the world as once known to dissipate. Invoking curiosity and power of will allows for exploration beyond where feet have ever touched, without need of taking a single step. Such is the way of the *bodhisattva*. Resonating with oneself as a planet does with its own moon is transcendence in waking presence. The *bodhisattva* walks in life as the harmonized element of æther, as the space between stars. Psychoactive sight reveals shadows in light and rays amidst darkness. Reverence awakens in certainty whilst basking under the stars.³ One falls into homesickness for intangible places.

Invocations of wanderlust and novelty speaks to one's inner child. Healing through traumatic experience, especially having occurred throughout childhood, may involve connecting with the inner child to provide the protection and safety they have never had the opportunity for. Every human must find a fine balance in acting as their adult self whilst allowing their inner child to express. Living in a world too childish curates a life lived alone in nativity. Living too much in adulthood is a curse in that the adult goes through the motions of life without actually living it. The child explores realms congruent with a language of the soul, getting purposely lost in worlds of imagination, wonderment, and creativity. There ought to be a way to transfer idealization into conceptualization; becoming into corporeality. Sometimes hope-filled states are best left to be felt in experience without need of translating.

Specks of life cast upon open eyes vastly across night sky. Layers upon layers of stars shine down on Earth from depths of galaxies far beyond where comprehension can reach. The soul speaks in silent conversation and remembers exactly whence it was wholly so a part of. Breath of air travels seamlessly down from the atmosphere to enter upon one's lungs, releasing from veins of leaves alike. One exhale is all that is needed to remind oneself that they are alive. Trails of smoke trace back to a lone campfire, its embers glowing through the still silhouette of woods. The animation of flames creates a twirling of heat. Trees border around as though forming a guardianship. A gust of wind

is all it takes to sweep their leaves off the security of their branches and gently float them away, landing swiftly in a stream nearby to drift in an unknown endeavor. The water, refreshing and cool yet warm in its provided comfort, cradles whatever may fall in its embrace. We dip a toe in and feel a remembrance of home.

The moon beams in clarity of empathy. A faint glow of light trickles through deception. Looking up reminds us to feel all around. A path begins to illuminate in the darkness, meandering through bare limbs of trees. A lake bestows before one's feet; cascading glimpses of twinkling stories. A rainbow seems to appear in areas of meek grey. The moon rising above mountain tops provides a visual reference to looking into our own emotional body. Receptivity exuberates the notion that we speak love through our very Being. Each interaction provides the opportunity to touch the infinite. We need only to glance into *jīva* of another entity to recognize the Universe in its entirety.

In the aftermath of traumatic events, trees in the forest of one's soul may obtain scarcity across their branches. A drizzle of light faintly passes through the empty space where leaves of life are supposed to be, like a star attempting to shine through overcast. The trauma survivor is cloaked by a darkness that almost appears brighter than light in its blinding quality. There is a pressure of a storm cloud heavy with a rain that never falls. The survivor becomes crushed between realms, unsure of where endwellment wants to pull them. They drink melancholia with each inhalation. It is somehow enough sustenance to stay solid, feeling a frozenness that seems as though it will not ever melt.

The wind provides communication in ways only the soul can hear. Bare branches sway in its words. In immense isolation, one does not need to feel alone. It is almost wished that they can stay there entirely. It seems easier to surrender to dissolution rather than try to grasp a form within materiality. A time will come when what is frozen will eventually shatter. Perhaps that is the escape craved for; to be totally deluged unto oneself whereas there is no other route to follow than the complete fractalization of identity. With all stripped away entirely maybe then we may see clearly.

An urge grows to willingly step fully into one's trauma. This would grant the very thing that ripped the ground out from underneath an individual to consume them whole. The individual is swallowed by that

which turned off the sun of their world and stripped them of any fragment of self. Notwithstanding, when all else is gone in a sweeping aside of a curtain and disintegration of props, then one will meet their true Self. In the inhabitancy of trauma also exists the essence of God.

Herein lies a plutonian journey through the process of compelling transformation. Uncovering from the aftermath of trauma is an expedition into nihilistic existentialism. We reach towards what is familiar in effort to find comfort; relapse being a prime example. Disidentifying with traumatic experience is a metamorphosed act in itself. Like a caterpillar or a star, it is required that we dissolve into ourself before gaining the freedom to soar. It is easy to hide in the dark. Stepping into the exposure of day is a more daunting task than staying in perpetual twilight.⁴

x: Embeingment

It ought not be forgotten that when speaking to embodiment in yoga, it is not just referencing the physical. Coming into oneself opens doors beyond places where feet could step. In a blissful act of stillness, one could come to play amongst stars. This is the art of yoga; a coming into pure subjectivity whereas individual subject is dropped. The practice opens space to rejoice in integrative expression of physical, emotional, mental, psychological, intuitive, and spiritual states of Being. Yoga is an artistic joining with the creator within.

In a context of transcendentalism, human is consciousness embodied. Consciousness therefore becomes conditioned, giving rise to thoughts, emotions, and cognitions. There is first a reaching down into the psychic soul and then a pulling back out into the world. Embodiment includes both awareness of one's self and their external environmental world.¹ Following interoception and proprioception, an individual learns their space within themselves and in the world. Experience of reality teaches how to receive through sensory engagement. Learning to interact with senses then teaches how to feel feelings. When feelings are felt, we may sink back deeper into a stance of observing.

Sitting as the observer to all experience comes in states of full embodiment. Contrarily, disembodiment entails a split in psyche and body.² Psychological dispositions remain untethered to physicality. An internal engagement in conflict ensues. Part of the self wants to be free, while another part desperately tries to hang on to anything at all. We become tethered to a storm cloud. Pressure inundates the system, generating a flood of doubt and overwhelm. Oneself begins to fray out in all sorts of directions. They become lost in a freedom diluted by deception.

Thinking of such wonders as the aurora borealis, one can come to experience the perception of a wonderment beyond integration by eyes alone. Something purely connects in ways we cannot put a word

to. Awe-ful states are really awe-inspiring. They bring about the same feeling in the body, like how anxiety and excitement can both be sensed as a racing heart and flooding of nerves. These are equivalent to moments that take one's breath away, like staring at an infinitely clear sky as the Milky Way shines down in tremendous luminosity beyond where words can tell. Or like the immense horror and terror of living through traumatic experience, bearing a grief so heavy it is as though the world crumbles. Both scenarios of awe carry the exact same weight.

Awe-inspiring moments stop us in our tracks. It forces us into mindfulness matched with intensity of the unknown. In trying to decipher what is within our field of present perspective, we are almost snapped back into our body in a way that feels as though we are holding the entire Universe in a mere speck of dust. Perspective may be reframed to view experiences in light of wonderment, curiosity, and inquisitiveness. We are otherwise posed to stay clung to being a victim of our own God.

Nondualistic perspectives of trauma entail that one needs not to fix anything because they are not broken. There is, essentially, nothing to heal from because they are already whole. Concern arises in how one goes about healing through trauma in this sense without bypassing their existence entirely. How does one validate an existence that is not bound by existential terms? Working with the body could make it more attainable to live within the world. Operating in the realm of the psyche makes it more attainable to live within one's own energy.

In some ways, disembodiment is an act of self-alienation. Embodiment is met as integrative wholeness; physical, neurological, emotional, psychological, intuitive, and spiritual all coexisting as one Being. Ultimately, it is a process of coming to find indwelling within one's own skin. Every moment comes to be lived as truly ensouled. We go through life thinking we are presented the sublime opportunity to play in cosmic bliss, when really that bliss plays through us. The outer world is a mere microcosm of the universe we carry inside ourselves. Self is the macrocosm.

Our psychic being lies as the observer to all happenings of experience. It is the soul of whom is aware of every thought, emotion, and sensation passing by. We can fall deeper into Being as awareness itself. This central Being is the spiritual core of existence. Somewhere

beneath thoughts, above all reason, and behind intuition lies true Self. Consciousness and materialism both are expressions of this divine Truth. Reality is real in its illusion. The curtain of *maya* is real because it is a direct language of true Reality. The illusory world is real in its expression; the infinite weaving its way through all inter-action.

As a reverse process similar to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Sri Aurobindo speaks to cosmic consciousness rippling through manifestations of existence.³ Rather than building from the ground up, we start in a space that is already whole. From there are manifested expressions of Spirit. Essentially, no distinction exists between the perceiver and the perceived object. One can trace back through these layers to return to their true nature, in pure perceiving.

Being able to perceive an experience of existence acts as a link between pure experiencing and that which exists. In other words, a rightly directed mind serves to unite matter with the Absolute. This unification lies in utmost stillness, a kinetic storage of flow such like how silence stands in the moment right before spoken word. Sri Aurobindo says the power of the yogi lies in serenity of unrestrained stillness.⁴ We must live in mundane existence in order to attune to suffering, from a place of compassion. Unity of individual subjects brings one into universal consciousness. Evolution is thus a spiritual process that begins inward.

Synthesis of experience reminds us of the ever-changing flow of lived subjectivity. As Heraclitus has proclaimed, you can never step in the same river twice. The infinite manifests itself in infinite ways. Each reflection is just as unique as it is the same. Sri Aurobindo speaks to Supermind as pure reflection of body, mind, and soul; a derivation of consciousness that shifts "from illumination to utter and boundless luminousness" (Aurobindo, 1981). Therein lies never-ending awareness, one that cannot be created but is existent in and only in itself. This is apparent in how the Universe can be found in every cell of being, in each single drop of water, and within the invisible boundaries of every relation.

At the core of all existence lies truth (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). Supermind is derived from these qualities. From there is a link to lower life forms of the material realm; a submerging of consciousness. This process is what allows for human to be human.⁵ A goal of integral yoga is to integrate physical, psychological, and spiritual

sides of lived experience. Intricately making one's way into harmonized wholeness directs one towards the inner world of which holds an entire cosmological landscape. An attempt is made to escape or find a way in. We must step beyond the ordinary to come to know the extraordinary.⁶ Existence seeps back into the transcendental. With each breath one is reminded of the weight of being alive; cosmic bliss disguising as confinement.

Yogic meditation allows for tuning to inner space. There exists a blurring of boundaries between where "I" ends and all else begins. From every felt vibrating cell of being, to sensing the space beneath ground of one's feet, awareness draws all the way out to the rings of Saturn as external sensory stimuli seem to muffle. Profound epiphany comes and begs attention to be put into some formulation of words. Entire belief systems flip in an instant like a circuit breaker switching back on that nobody realized was off. Energy is provided for true Self to be lived embodied. Two worlds bridge whereas the dialectical human condition is transcended upon. Soul emerges as the world collapses.

Trauma and healing coexist on the same coin, and yoga connects them like the sly rim around heads and tails. In order to have access to one we need to approach the other. There is also a way to have access to both, to experience trauma and healing at the same time. Further, it is attainable to sit uninvolved between the two. This between world is yoga. To sit in the solace of grey, the space inbetween, is leaning towards this notion of embeingment. Integration is reached as these two sides melt together in utter correspondence.

Healing through trauma is not linear. In the diversity of complex trauma, there is likely not something or someone to return back to; at least on a surface level. We are not meant to be the same as who we were before enduring traumatic events. Posttraumatic growth entails an understanding of pain in both necessity and in visceral experience. Phenomenologically, one's personhood is not lost amidst flashbacks of trauma. It feels as though we are entirely back there, but we are our present person experiencing the past trauma. Our core sense of Being cannot be displaced. Even in dissociative episodes we are experiencers of dissociation. A process that seems mental becomes somatic in passive embeddedness. Taking on the viewpoint of a philosopher in questioning the false narrative of trauma stories helps to reframe, rewrite, and recreate what it means to be alive. The story is written

here and now, and no longer there. This is not a resolving from, but an active working through; in passiveness of observation and inquisitiveness. Metaphoric chronicles thus ensue.

Falling into a vortex of I-ness, one comes to realize that the only true identity is one of no identity. Non self equates to pure Being. True identity is too whole to reduce down to one letter. The inferred interpretation of trauma in subjective philosophy questions the expression of what is unsayable. Thus, emphasizing how traumatic experience and response to it could profoundly shape one's narrative of self. The individual is autonomous when it comes to making meaning of experience. When all else is taken away from them, an individual's ability to create meaning remains resolute. The creative process serves as a refuge. Constellations may be drawn in the unpredictable scatteredness.

Intro: Home

The end is a mirage for a beginning. An exhalation cannot happen unless there is first an inhale. The journey of solace begins in a state of distress. As peace is known from experience of turmoil, everlasting joy is thus followed by sorrow. We are trapped by an illusion of omnipresence. What is truly omniscient cannot be perceived by traditional means. Reaching beyond the senses opens a gate to the indefinite. Met is an endlessness that knows no bounds. Trickling out to the vastness of fog in a psychic cloud, the mind becomes portrayed into reality. What is it like to encounter one's own psyche in an actualized form; to look out and see within? Perhaps much like looking in to see without.

Events of adversity create the ultimate illusion. They may cause one to question their very existence. Somewhere within polarity lies the key to wisdomful understanding. Trauma and yoga tie together in the middle ground of grey between black and white, physical and mystical, and body and mind. Trauma survivors may find refuge in spirituality, fantasy, animals, nature, and art. In grave understanding of trepidations of life, insofar as death is experienced while still alive, they have a psychic intonation moreso than individuals without a history of trauma. They are therefore natural healers, as are the yogis, artists, and poets who are not afraid to translate what is mythical into something tangible.

Duality is escaped from by diving right into it. Spaces within sides ought to be explored upon, rather than trying to step outside what cannot be left unless leaving behind the physical body. The body is as subject to polarities of the Earthly realm as is decomposing plant matter. Home is welcoming just what is in every moment.¹ It is a felt sense of Being, an ultimate resonance of safety. Moments of total absorption in the present are like insightful conversations whilst gazing upon stars. It is all too easy to get lost in these dreams and lose

connection with other humans, forgetting that they too are reflections of this same cosmic dust.

The Fool card in tarot shows a liminal space where there is no I or am. Existence fades, then suddenly snaps closed. There entails nothingness, a floating and cradling in empty solace of solitude. Loneliness from absence of self is gone, blissfully alone now in time spent wholly in company of Self. This desolate place is Home. Death realizes into birthright, vanishing from here to zap into the infinity of there. A play ensues of cosmic fractalization. Particles reform, filling out a different code, and rearrange into the potential of anything. Crystalline formation of starlight descends as auras fade, crashing into bright light. The moment of birth is conceived death. Am-ness takes a shape and definition. I therefore am.

Stepping into the space between night and day, the area of grey begs to be accompanied in its lonesome. It is being both alone and together, here nor there and somehow both. Qualities are attributed as black and white but also not quite either. There are so many shades to call one's place of residence. Escaping the hold of duality may be human's greatest mission. This is the soil of common ground between topics laid out in this creative work. Yogic philosophy tries to establish a bridge between subject and object, similar to the workings of transcendentalism and transpersonal psychology. The miswiring of living in Complex PTSD too proves to be amongst grey. Therein also lies liminal space between dream and waking, day and night, light and shadow, and here nor there.

Human acts as the conduit between below and above. Standing in *tāḍāsana*, or mountain pose, brings awareness to the connection through soles of the feet into the ground, the soil of Earth residing underneath, and the interconnected roots that lie beneath the soil. Awareness draws up through the crown of the head, sensing out into the space of air, up into the sky and clouds, all the way up through the atmosphere of Earth to feel the presence of trillions of surrounding stars. One stands with fortitude, feeling groundedness in both directions of below and above. At the same time a softness is allowed to pervade the shoulders, jaw, and breath. With arms dangling gently at one's sides, palms open and face forward to receive all that life places in front of oneself.

Breathing here, recognition comes that standing in *tāḍāsana* is enough. Simply being *here*, noticing that one is alive, is more than enough. Knowing brings with it a felt empowerment. All that is required is to be here and breathe, and that is enough justification in itself to say one is worthy of being alive. There is no need to overshare about trauma that has been endured. There can often be a sense felt of needing to explain oneself when feeling flooded. The individual knows very well what happened to them. They have a choice and autonomy to disclose however much they want to. They need not explain how they have walked through fire to be where they are. Others who are authentic see it and acknowledge it, without need of having to say anything at all.

An individual who has gone through trauma walks their story in embodied narrative. Their authenticity radiates beyond the boundaries of their skin. Standing within their own empowerment speaks in itself how adversity fuels fortitude. Yoga provides the space for an individual to stand here now, recognizing a self-acknowledgment that perhaps has been missing for quite some time. It is okay now to breathe. Existing, taking up space, is permissible.

Trauma-informed yogic practices may be used as a means to self-regulate while avoiding retraumatization like other techniques for intervention might cause. Treatment modalities with lack of trauma-informed care are very likely to bring more harm than good. The fact that a trauma survivor can sit presently here and breathe and have that be enough is profound. They may feel they have gone through their entire life without ever having the space to breathe. The healing power of yoga is advocated for because it allows one the space to Be. That serves as a catalyst for healing trauma. The *invitation* to step into this space within oneself, is also yoga.

Trauma is a doorway to spiritual awakening, self-actualization, self-realization, and liberation. One meets a magnitude of strength they would not have otherwise known. Trauma strips away the self, thus coming to find Self. A greater whole of existence resides deep within, ingrained in the body and seeping beneath the psyche. The soul resides in an intermediate alcove between body and mind. The soul must find an indwelling writhing in a severed chord. Trauma uncoverly lies in this space of limbo. The journey itself is the landing; a process of becoming undivided. Maybe that is what Jung meant in his term of individuation.

The word, recovery, is not of favor in this written work due to the complexities of early developmental trauma diminishing a tangible I-self to return back to. The trauma could be all one has known from an infantile or juvenile age. We must dive even deeper into who we were before the world had a chance to taint our essence a different hue.

The child is an archetype of paradoxical wholeness.² Duality pulls them between two worlds. On a level of soul, one rests in a liminal space. It is not here nor there, but a sort of third space to be reached through the notion of spacelessness. A child already lives a life ensouled. The world has no end for the child, shores and water build no boundaries. There is only a sense of playfulness and eagerness, wanderlust and wonderment. There is always something magically more where the finite meets the infinite along lines of horizons.³ Worlds do not end at drawn lines. Trauma creates an unequivocal disaster whereas the child (inner being) becomes separated from their own stars.

Decompartmentalization occurs in obtaining a deep understanding of the sacred. Union permeates through integration of psyche and world. Early trauma is stored in the right brain since that is what is online during such young age.⁴ Art is therefore an entryway into both trauma and healing states, giving expression through metaphorical language. The physical body allows trauma a form to speak, but trauma is stored deeper in the subconscious. It is a wound on the nervous system, a map of energetic exile. Trauma is found in the space beneath, within, between and behind. Likewise, the wound is grown from the same soil as health. The access point is identical.

The soul is not meant to be understood. We cannot stand under what is to be stood upon. A metaphysical plane of ethereal familiarity posits itself among the Earth, where flowers all glow in the moonlight and nothing can hinder the giddiness surging through veins. Trees line in watch as keeper of the soul while the individual is entirely free to explore in pure wonderment of the simple joy of experiencing what it is like to be alive. Stars may be rearranged however one pleases. Traumatized individuals are seemingly able to step between two realms of physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal, material and immaterial. They are not quite here yet not fully engulfed in there. To speak a duo language of two realms is an artistry in itself. They are simultaneously living as no thing and everything. This too is yoga. In a

twist of paradox comes the ultimate bliss; learning to know the Self. Awe-ful, indeed.

Yogis also likely have had these experiences of stepping between realms, where they find themselves not quite here yet not fully in the presence of there. Those are such places where we dance on stars without moving an inch. That is the place of reference in saying grey. When hearing the word grey, one may think gloomy, dreary or somber. But really grey can be so infinitely colourful. It is a space of peace, joy, bliss, balance, integration, holism, and centeredness. Grey provides solace on the means of indifferent neutrality that is perfection.

Saturnine aspects of perpetual twilight are a bridge of ecstasy, where sadness is valued just the same as happiness. Standing on the line of *yuj*, entranced in yoga, brings a development of complete and total union. We may look out as the observer to all these perspectives of philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience and see that yoga gives an answer for directly accessing a means of healing trauma by transforming events of dis-ease into fuel for well-being; all attained in the mere yet profound act of breathing. In breathing, we are Being. And that is more than enough.

Appendix

Experiences must be assimilated internally in order to be truthfully understood. Self-exploration is one example of lived subjectivity. A feeling of isolation is carefully crafted from the aftermath of trauma as an individual is turned off from the world. Trekking through the rummage warrants a solitary evaluation. Finding our way back to ourselves is a task we all do alone together.

In the journals and paintings following, personal accounts are given on topics relating to dissociation, depression, and suicidal ideation, and where yoga has held space for profound healing. The paintings further convey words by the writer that would otherwise be left unspoken. They were produced in raw assembly of emotionality. Trauma uncovering invites a meeting with one's Self. Working through the layers of conditioning and sheer pain teaches what it means to be wholly connected in liveliness. Pronounced pains are a stage of rebirth, reminding how darkness is as necessary as light.

Grief does not get smaller as time passes, but rather we learn how to grow larger around it. Weight feels lighter as we gain more strength. It feels as though trauma will always be residing in some structure of my existence. However, the space it takes up does not have to be all-consuming. Perhaps I am too ill in throwing fate to trauma and its debilitating effects, approaching my shadow as a friend. It certainly feels more real than my own nature. I trust the shadowy aspects of death much more so than the light of life. Maybe one experiences trauma for the same reason the sky is black; it provides a canvas for stars. Nonetheless, I currently aim to sit as a bystander, observing a fantasized realm where sunsets paint colours through the night.

dissolution

yūgen (n.) : the subtle yet profound sense of the Universe, and the sad beauty of human suffering.

My current state of existence entails a journey of play on which I could bring the stars down to Earth. This sort of cosmic game plunges me into a desolate landscape of subliminality. I exist amongst a world I am not a part of. To be of some Reality far beyond comprehension while stepping my feet in a restricted physicality forms a rift. I find myself on a plane that is not quite here, yet not fully there. I cannot help but to feel as though I am wrong for existing. And so I retreat into a space of idealism, where imagination provides more numerous acquaintances than the outer world does. Likewise, time spent alone with myself proves to be a treacherous task. It took a long time to find solace in my solitude. Being with oneself is perhaps the hardest task to encounter.

I oftentimes feel entirely alone while within a group. This used to cause a sense of desperation and hopelessness, to try to fit in upon a frequency I was not tuned to. In my own stillness is when I most freely echo to the tune of the Universe. The lonely hollows of my soul present as a grave blessing. My introversion is a gift, with silence providing an access point into introspection and insight. I have a cave to retreat to no matter where my physical body is standing. Being lost in the world is simply an analogy of sitting at Home within myself. It is thus not possible to lose oneself when there is no set destination to seek towards. We are free to innocently wander, with the trust that we are always exactly where we are supposed to be, eternally now.

In my metaphysical travels, a nebulous fog overtakes me. I sometimes find my mind sinking in delusion, with root taken hold in hallucinatory experience. Further self-reflection alludes to the knowledge that such formulations of intellect are perhaps not so unreal after all. Some moments are so unstably fleeting it is as though I

am anchored to the fog. There is no choice but to vanish along with the mist. I made myself disappear, yet I was only invisible to my own self. I am already dead and want more than anything to feel alive. My shadow seems more real than I feel. I have had to learn to breathe underwater, observing from depths of subtle ground below fluidity of wariness.

The forest became a whimsical escape. Rocks and plants spoke to my child self in ways humans never could. Somewhere along coming of age, inner (child) and outer (adult) worlds detach in cosmic distance. Yet, both are necessary in order for any one to thrive. I sometimes meet trees in the shape of humans, cosmic dust swaying through one's soul like an adornment of leaves. The sky speaks through eyes, and the oceans through feeling. Attuning to other's experience is akin to breathing the same air. My carbon dioxide transmutes into their oxygen. Suddenly I feel new life in places I let die. A mutual exchange occurs of reverent Self-compassion.

Working in psychiatric treatment settings, the act of performing co-regulation almost teaches me skills for my own self-regulation. Holding space for others is seemingly much more fluid and natural. Turning attention towards myself is naught but a difficult chore. I was taught from a very young age that self-sufficiency was of necessity for survival, by any means necessary. Being there for others in raw moments of vulnerability is teaching me how to be there for myself in the same way.

While sitting with myself after a yogic practice one evening, my left hip popped in such a way that for a good five seconds I felt a lightness in that side of my body that I have never felt before. At first I thought something had snapped because it felt so strange. I moved my leg and it was like it was floating in weightlessness of ease. My hip popped again and the chronic soreness I was accustomed to came right back. Simultaneously, my mind was trailing off on thinking about how much of a hypocrite I am to work with trauma clients in a yogic counselling practice and tell them they ought to be in their body, when I myself am not at all in my body nor hold any interest in doing so. I have always associated my body with pain and heaviness. I feel no desire to be in my physical body.

In glimpses of moments where I float in little to no pain, which are rare but have fleetingly occurred, all I want to do is hop around and

play, to climb trees and do headstands, because it feels so amazing just to be alive. In those moments I always thought I was entirely dissociated from myself because it was as though I entered a whole different realm of which could not possibly be translated into physicality. Whenever I engage in a yogic practice, from *āsana* or meditation to contemplating on philosophical wisdom, I feel something cosmic. It is as though I am dancing on stars in a blissful art of stillness. A realization randomly came to me, smacking my ego and knocking it out cold, that the feeling of utter cosmic bliss *is what it is like to be truly embodied*. This is a truth I am not sure I am ready to face.

During those moments of pure and thoroughgoing glee, connecting with life is effortless. I yearn to shake hands with all the leaves, saying “hi” to each blade of grass and every tiny ant. My energy floats, as if high off simply living, carrying me in light sweetness of pure delight. I thought in those moments I was losing touch with reality; a land of false ecstasy I suppose. Those fleeting bits of what felt like entire disconnection were perhaps the exact opposite, and I was really feeling joy in sheer connectedness. This was so out of my norm to want to engage with life and to feel in my cells this engagement. I would become weightless, hopping across clouds with my feet still somehow on the Earth’s soil.

Because my custom is a dissociative state, groundedness often feels heavy as though I am glued down. I cannot even move if I wanted to because I lose all motivation to want to try to move. I lose motivation to want to *want*. That heaviness, stuckness, and entrapment within my body is present maybe because I am actually living disembodied. Those moments of free flow, sailing afloat in euphoria, is what it is like to be fully and integratively embodied within oneself. I laughed at first when this realization came to me. I was stricken aback to learn that I have been so disconnected from myself that the simple joy of living felt exceedingly foreign whereas I thought I was crazy for feeling it. I am still trying to sit with and process such a flip in perspective, to fall deeper than where my mind attempts to understand. I am lost in navigating what it means to the depth of my soul to be embodied.

In that particular moment on my yoga mat that night, it felt like I energetically took a step diagonally to my right, like I had been askew one odd step. My entire framework of thought is reframing such experiences of that blissful lightness as the opposite of dissociation. It

is hard to wrap my head around the idea that the constant pain and heaviness is actually the dissociative episode, and the fragments of complete and total freedom is what it feels like to be fully in the body.

Withdrawing from physicality was always my ultimate escape. *Pratyahara*, or withdrawal of the senses, quickly became my favorite limb of yoga. It seemed like a way out. If I could learn to control and quiet the senses, perhaps I could find the space to truly listen. I am not one to shy away from diving deep into the trenches of the psyche, jumping into transcendental topics of endless questioning. Part of me enjoys the struggle of having something to crawl out from. Diving into the mind was not the answer I was seeking. Apparently all I had to do was step an inch into my body. And for a split second all that heaviness I was carrying for the past two decades just completely disintegrated, a somatic sensation felt like steam lifting off skin.

Integrating adversity as fortitude brings about a lightness. I have never associated the body with any feeling remotely close to bliss. My entire perception of embodiment is being born anew. When we hear the body we think physical, but that is not necessarily the case. There is no separate body. In attempt of balance we are reminded of the grasp that duality has when we forget who we are. The body is physical, and mental, emotional, neurological, energetic, subtle, intuitive, spiritual, and none of these things; all wrapped up in one vessel we label human.

My body is buried in heaviness exemplary of stored trauma. I am ready to step in to find that those glimpses of utter freedom are not ideals lost somewhere in space. They are what it means to be fully embodied. Dissociation gives way to presence. An empirical philosophy forms where the stars speak through manifest Self. Yogic practice invites a still act of stepping between ordinary and mystical to find the space to truly listen to inner divine essence in unmitigated connection. Body does not equate physical. Diving into topics on life, Self, existence, nature of reality, and phenomenology reveal what it means to be whole; an internal felt sense of safety that resides deep beneath bones.

Pain is identified with to the point of which I am blinded by it. I have not even realized that I could not see anything else. My life is built upon cognitive distortion. I have been living disembodied, viewing myself as an object whilst all else glows in pure subjectivity. Really, embodiment is that pure subjectivity; becoming the screen upon which we have been watching our lives pass by. Embodiment may be

reworded as embeingment. It is a nondual act of stepping wholly into oneself. It is that homesickness for a place that does not quite exist. It is that feeling of dancing freely across galaxies.

The pain is there because I have been running from the very thing I have been craving. A disconnect occurs in translation. Perception of suffering seems to disappear entirely in those slight moments of feeling totally connected with myself. I am intrigued to break into the psychological handlings of what is causing physical pain to manifest. The deepest wound serves as the greatest gift; an innate power to heal. Thus, transformative dissolution shall take place.



saturnine

saturnine (adj.) : dark in disposition, mysterious, gloomy, melancholic.

Each day I wake up with existential dread. I am barred by the weight of depression; it has been like that as early as I can remember. There may be a few hours during the day that brings contentment. It always fades, never offering a break. Malaise demonstrates to be unwavering. It is difficult enough to live within this world, and that is exemplified further by the challenge of living within my body. I cannot ever catch a break. Something always feels off. A melody rings in a harmonization that appears untruthfully misaligned.

It is as though I exist as a glitch in the matrix, like I am not supposed to be here. No matter what I do, how hard I try, or how much I change in the external, I will never fit this mold. How am I expected to fit in a binary world when I do not even fill my own skin? Such is the all too real awareness of what is unreal. I am wearing a suit that is not my size. I do not feel ownership of this skin. It is as though I am stars wrapped beneath an encasement of captivity. I do not feel remotely human. This extends to gender identity as well. What is manifested out into representation of a tangible world does not match the inherent rhapsody housed beneath skin. The roots that breathe infinite life do not take hold in solidity.

Social alienation extends to human alienation. It is as though I am being forced to play a role as a person so convincingly that I cannot take off my costume. I do not understand how to be in a physical body, let alone how to behave around others. Having a neurodivergent brain is like a lack of ability in grasping what it means to be human. This is to the point of debilitation, unnoticeable due to my skill in masking. Nobody knows how much I struggle in each waking minute. I mask, putting on a performance in a dire attempt to fit into a society I should have never crashed into to begin with. Pity me not, for I am not a victim, but more like an imposter. I am a cosmic speck masquerading as

one of people. I have no shame for who I am beneath the veil of skin. Transliteration into physical reality is where I meet a blockage. I am trapped in a vessel not owned by me.

I truly and wholly love solemn states. Comfort descends on rainy days in a misted haze that invites the curation of snugness. There ought not to be an emotion viewed as wrong. Sadness is just the same as happiness. All emotions simply are. They can present problems just the same if stuck in them for too long whether it be a “positive” or “negative” presentation. Everlasting dysthymia is not something to treat. It ought not to be viewed as a disease to pray away. I cannot be treated because I am not broken; there is nothing to fix. I am so wholly put together that society seems shattered.

A yogic stance suggests one should aim to sit as the indifferent witness to all experiences of the mental mind; including emotions, thoughts, rationales, memories, and plays of logic. This is not the place I live. Living in my thoughts, repressed emotions, or past memories would result in absolute misery. We are permitted to experience a river of such states float by rather than jumping in to drown. The same could be said for physical states. I do not live in my body, but *through* it. It is the vehicle of which I am able to partake in the act of perception. Just as a person who is blind cannot tap into the frequency state of sight, there is an unknown infinitum of states which are unperceivable to the mechanisms of biological form. A whole Reality exists beyond where physical senses can reach. It is among this invisibility where I stand. How on Earth would that be able to translate?

A lot of my suffering alleviated when I decided that perpetual somberness is not a bad place to be. Twilight speaks truth in its deceptive rays. The desolation of saturnine states brings me solace. It could be perhaps due to familiarity of traumatic experience, the hyper-realization of the unreality of experience, or a perception deceived by bright calamity. In being entirely disconnected, I am all too connected. Extremes of polarities throw me across borders. I cannot know what is real, but I do know what is wholly unreal. *Brahman* speaks in ways that words fail to portray.

Grey especially brings comfort in dissociative states. I play a part as a dream character, separated from others and surroundings by an invisible magnetic screen. Dissociation is quite a common symptom with C-PTSD. It serves as a coping mechanism and a survival response

to trauma. I have experienced this state my entire life, though it got insurmountably worse my first semester of college. I have never felt so out of place in relation to the world and to my body. I felt trapped in a video game, going through the motions of a simulated life I was not intrinsically or fundamentally a participant of. I could not tell if others could see me because in looking with my eyes, I could not see them. I seemed to look right through. The firmament bestowed before me crumbled as my identity seemed to disintegrate along with it.

It was not until I dabbled in psychedelic medicine in the sphere of healing ceremonies that I felt comfortable in these states. In fact, dissociation was an invitation to step Home. It brings about fear, paranoia, and panic in absolute uncertainty. Everything one once knew dissolves in the air around them. It can bring about belief that you are absolutely going mad, experiencing an existential malfunction, or having a psychotic break. It may sound absurd to say, but it may be that dissociation is a step into enlightening states. Losing one's mind allows them to find their heart.

One thus comes to meet a plane somewhere between physical and dream, beneath physiological and mental, and behind reality. A joining in universal consciousness is paradoxically done by separating fusion of the individual mind with the presence of *puruṣa*. Within a divided consciousness, yogic meditation gives clear sight to that which is Real; free from bias of the mind. In that way, dissociative states may very well provide the same sort of clarity in disconnect. There is dismantling of attachment. Rather than viewing depersonalization as a mental disorder, it may be viewed as a deconstruction of ego in deliberation.

I love the gloomy aspects of myself quite honestly. Perhaps it is an addiction to depressive episodes. Regardless of the case though, I wholeheartedly am in love with the way the world looks from a somber lens. Happiness brings with it more misery in my experience. Sadness does have a beautifully aesthetic quality to it, such as solemn autumn days. Too much brightness gives me a headache at the very least. I am learning that I myself mediate as the grey between black and white. I am viewing the ends of spectrums in extremes because I exist as this middle ground. I am exactly the thing I have been searching for. Sitting in such truths has begun to completely dismantle this false narrative comprising that I am wrong for existing. For the time spent engaging in

philosophical yoga, all that is required to do is breathe; to stay present moment, to moment, to moment...

In that effect, time becomes timeless. And the practice does not end so long as one is conscious. The complex simplicity of yoga speaks through one's essence without so much as ever having to utter a sound. I would like to put forth faith that turning down the noise is how to dismantle the grip of trauma. I am Home with my Self now. "O my soul, I understand the smiling of your melancholy " (Nietzsche, 2010, 175).



trigger

fernweh (n.) : far sickness, a longing for unseen places, a sense of wanderlust

It feels toxic to have to appease everyone. It is not as simple as giving up the disposition of people-pleasing; doing so would mean terminating this life. Why should I have to torture myself for the benefit of others? I am grateful to have a few people who support me, but it feels sickening not to remove myself from this life just because I am afraid or guilty of being an inconvenience. Having something gives me that much more to lose. It is quite ironic that having support is along the same spring winding to push me off the edge. Part of me does not want anyone to care. How easy it would be to live only and solely by one's own terms. I contemplate on what stops me from seeking a solitary refuge in mountain caves. Honouring oneself is an accomplished fulfillment I am nowhere near fully reaching. Though when I look down, I am horizons beyond where I once was. I sometimes hold so much pride that I lose the ability to be proud.

Getting immersed in a creative state of flow is when I truly and authentically feel I am living my Truth. All is okay in exactly how it is. If taking one step out from flow state, I instantly feel suicidal. It is an overwhelming sense of not wanting to be here. It feels wrong; unbearable, even. But whenever I get into cosmic flow, I am overwhelmed with bliss. It is euphoric to feel so alive. These moments are brief, often apparent when I am lost in a painting, submersed in the safety of yogic practice, or whilst conversing with an inner monologue. Every cell seems to shimmer in ecstasy. Stars swirl in emanation through the rendering of my being. All dissolves wholeheartedly into pure Being.

I am not quite sure where my mental state lies. I have gotten so used to the pain that it seems normal. And yet, I wake up each morning with a weight of dread and flaring panic. There is this feeling I cannot shake that something is awfully wrong. I am tired in a way sleep does

not solve. I want a break from the noise, at the very least. Floating in waves of meditation brings with it a calm that feels otherworldly. There ought to be ways to bring this resonance into integration with every day lived experience. The world has proven that it is far too magickal to feel so dully mundane. I cannot seem to convince myself that anything is safe here. Having to track everything is exhausting. I notice every sly detail. Intellectualization thrives within me but when it comes to existing in a social world outside of my own cave of solitary idealism, I greatly feel disconnected. I seem to perceive the world differently than most humans; nay am I inferior. I am simply wired differently. I love every bit of what is deemed dysfunctional about my neurology.

My subjective world is filled to the brim with imagination and deep understanding of darkness. My hardest challenge is existing within my own skin. I feel misunderstood, often coming across in language of misrepresentation. I reason my own self-alienation is what isolates me from others. Everything is utterly daunting. It feels wrong to honour my needs, like I am not worthy enough of receiving treatment, or that I do not deserve to have my life be even remotely a little easier. My existence is formulated on terms of fallacy. Connecting with the vital force of life, of which is our breath, is probably one of my greatest triggers. It is an immediate reminder that I am here living. The weight of my heart screams loudly at me as each breath grows deeper into the space of my vessel. I can feel my muscles tense more as they are fed nourishment of Spirit from highways of blood. It feels strained, constricted, as though fighting against the very thing that is needed. There is not enough to accommodate what my body needs. No matter how deep I breathe it is not enough; it never seems to be.

I am slapped with awareness of just how connected all the systems of the body are. My yogic practice brings up insights about my nervous system and emotional body. Even in the relaxation of *Savāsana*, or corpse pose, I cannot seem to turn off the underlying urge to run. I have had scary symptoms relating to my heart plenty of times, growing almost accustomed to not feel any concern. I think about how I was born with a murmur that never outgrew as it was supposed to. My heart beats erratically, reflective of the psychological baggage I carry. I think of the times my sympathetic response is so strong that my heart seems to drop, beating remarkably harsh and rapid that it is all I can hear. In those moments I cannot get any breath past my chest. My

body falls limp in both numbness and intense pain. Each inhale feels as though tiny knives are piercing through nerve endings lining beneath the surface of where I can touch. Lying in inversions until it passes seems to help. Something about shifting tactile perspective and having my legs up in shoulder stand or along a wall tricks my body into seeing that it is not in any danger.

I try in effort to revert to the yogic mindset of sitting as the silent observer, witnessing all within my current field of sensation. The pain is okay; all I have to do is keep breathing. Stillness would be the only thing that brings any comfort, though my mind is anything but still. There is tightness in my chest yet groundedness through the soles of my feet. I feel rooted in clouds. My mind races amongst anticipatory motivation. I am waiting for something that does not seem to exist. An intangible homesickness prevails.

This body is a prison cell of skin. Part of me feels nothing but overt gratitude to be able to walk among the Earth, to marinate in the sensory pleasures of painted sunsets and warm cappuccinos. Yet something does not feel safe. How can connection be sought when I am wholly detached from myself? I am a being unrecognizable in glance of mirrors. When feeling my way within this body, there is an uneasiness that strips me of breath and causes my legs to tremble. Every ounce of my vessel screams for me to get out. I feel encased, trapped in a life I have died from many times over. In moments of intense flashback, I wish for nothing else than for life to altogether erase me. Cognitive accuracy is wiped out by survival response. I fully relive moments of trauma in some twisted synchronicity with present creation. I am pulled in polar directions, neither quite fully getting a grasp. I can hear my mind screaming for some resolve. Nevertheless, I am so grateful my body is able to ask for help in those moments when I am unable to.

It is tantalizing to try to keep present within myself and to the moment. While engaged in a yogic practice, I do my best to bring awareness to where my body and my mind are in that particular moment. It feels like time slows down when I consciously make the effort to take a step back and pause. For that hour or two, I try not to worry about what needs to get done, how fatigued I am, or how much pain my body is in. I observe and acknowledge where myself is at. I allow the world around me to soften as I fall into contemplation on

self-acceptance. I become the observer to all that is within awareness. And though the world may be crumbling, somehow all is okay.

I beg with my soul to formulate an inner safety that radiates beyond the confines of my vessel. Something that we always have present to fall back on is our breath. It is an interestingly different perspective to engage in an exploration of breath as a resource rather than a trigger. What amounts is the recognition of the divine quality of breath; an energy of Spirit. And I inquire with curiosity why it is such that bringing awareness to my breath instantly causes my chest and torso to clamp up. I ponder how something so immensely natural can feel like the most difficult task at times.

Breath is the key to getting into the body. It is a reminder that one is alive and is contained in a vessel that is able to perceive all life has to offer. Those truths alone are hard to grapple with because my body has always been interpreted as a source of pain. When putting forth effort to observe my relationship with breath, I notice how panic and *prāṇa* move through the body in a similar sense, like how anxiety and excitement mimic the same sensation. It sometimes builds to a state of feeling overwhelming. It is magical that we can utilize breath to release pent up tension. Sending this life force energy to these places of the body creates space for underlying emotions to express themselves. Maybe it is okay now to breathe.

Lately, yogic practice has been equally as triggering as it has been healing. Bringing awareness to breath brings awareness to my body, which brings hyperawareness to the intense pain stored within. This then in turn sends my mind into dark places and memories. Even more affliction is dredged up as a result. I am entrapped in grave existential torment as suicidality takes a hold. Connecting with myself again feels both remediable and lethal.

The hold of suicidality presents as a dense black smoginess that hides behind my left side. When talking about memories associated with trauma, I notice that my gaze tends to get fixed to the right, as though I want to look entirely away. Maybe resolve comes with the very notion of facing that which we want more than anything to disregard. I know my trauma, far too well, so I know there is not fear in recognizing it. Perhaps it makes it all too real, to acknowledge the burden of it all. I always have problems with my left side. I feel places of stored trauma in the left hip and joints of the knee and ankle. That

side is weaker and more off balance. Sitting in a classroom or office must be done whereas colleagues are on my right or in front, and there is a wall or door to my left. I need to sleep in fetal position on the left side to avert the feeling of being exposed. It is as though my right side is more equipped to carry myself, because the left is consumed by the density of grief.

Out of sheer curiosity and reckless impulse, I unreadily decided to invite in this dark smog. Was this what Jung meant by integrating the shadow? When I really, willingly look at this supposed menacing entity, I notice it also contains within it the exact opposite of grief. It is unconditional love, compassion, and forgiveness. In all of the weight alike, whether heavy or light, it begs to be let in. It is competing with the tug of gravity for my attention. I find white to be equally as heavy as black. It is beginning to become apparent that this black smog is actually grey, and all that it wants is to be noticed and named. In trying to formulate an identification for it, I can almost hear it whisper in its seizure, "this is you". The smog creeps up only to dissipate back whenever I turn to look at it. It seems to cling to me and hang over like a storm cloud that would just not let its rain loose. The pressure has built to the point of total consumption. But really that was I; a dissociated part to an epitomized wholement. It was not a threat, and it was not the trauma. It was me, buried underneath an identity that was not at all mine.

There is a sense of decay, a fossilization coming forth through life. Partaken was a preservation of any remnant of my own self. It is almost as though I am now thawing and defrosting from a much too far prolonged freeze state. I had been away from myself since before I had even gotten the chance to know who I am. I struggle in giving myself permission to live. Succumbing to life is an arduous task. I was taught by shadows how to play a role in this world without having to actually be an active participant.

The left side of my body has learned how to compartmentalize. There is a dichotomy in my existence, from a very real and tangible form on a physical level that radiates into my emotional body and thoughts, and tiptoes down the stairwells of my psyche to formulate a constellation of dissociated pieces. What this compartmentalizing manifests as is a numbness and achiness across the left half of my body. Along with this is a feeling of fractalization, as though parts of me

are in decomposition. My normal range of presence feels around forty percent on a good day. Within a chronic dissociative state, sixty percent is like my one hundred. The left side of my body can very often be at only a twenty, and all percentage of that makes itself known as perceived pain. It is usual for me to feel like less than half myself is actually here at any point in time. I am lost in the storytelling of thoughts, the grappings of the past, a seizure of lacerating memory. I almost feel a need to grieve the fact that I did survive, because at times I wish more than anything that I have not had.

I remember the first time I really considered taking my own life. I have had suicidal thoughts since a very young age. I recall being six years old considering myself an atheist. Losing touch with God was a losing touch with my own Self. I was a ghost of a human. When I seriously planned to kill myself for the first time, I was about to turn fourteen years old. I had a tarot card reading done at the time which brought up the message that I held in thought an action that was not like me to partake in. I remember immediately knowing that it was suicide. I felt dazedly plagued. I had these voices inside my head that spoke my own tone, but they were not mine. I began to name them; “ana” for anorexia, “deb” for the cloud of depression. This one of suicidality did not feel so much like a friend as the others did.

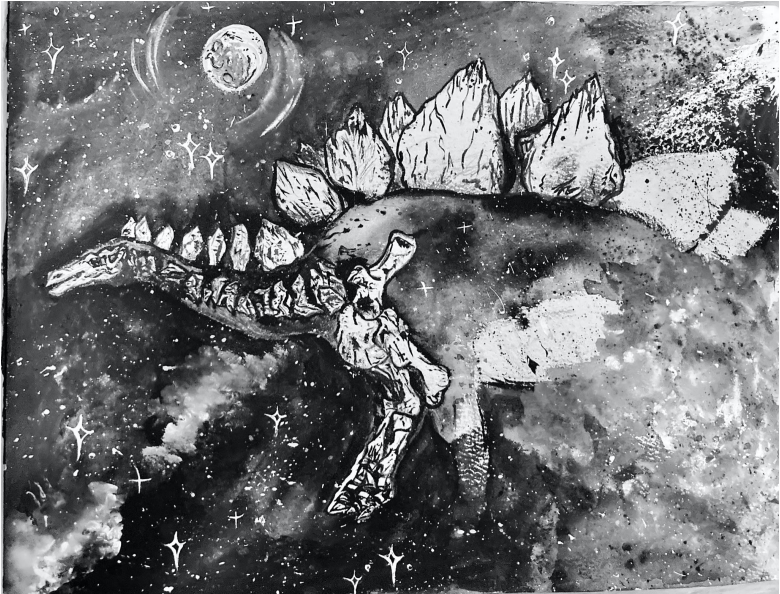
Over the next decade I would spend numerous moments standing on the edge of bridges, scared that they were not quite tall enough to know with full certainty that I would not wake up upon falling. I always coaxed myself down. I would frequently walk alone late at night, allowing myself to be an open target. I would not care to look when crossing streets, sometimes purposely idling in lanes of traffic in hopes that vehicles may just not stop fast enough. When I began praying to God again, I begged him to take me. I wanted them to take me instead of somebody else dying of cancer or hunger. I wanted to leave with my dear and special friend when I found out she was tragically murdered.

I would slit my wrists and thighs, sometimes vertically along a vein, in hopes that it would accidentally cut too deep. My body became a blank canvas. Thousands of etches mark my skin across every inch now, functioning as a constant reminder of an invisible pain that was far too unconcealed. My reality felt distorted. How could my pain be so intangible and yet at the same time more real than I myself could

fathom? It was as though I was in a constant state of hiding in plain sight.

Feeling trapped within my own existence led to a craving for any sort of release. I needed to turn off all sense of feeling, to become as numb on the outside as I felt internally. Metal blades deceived me into believing that self-destruction would provide comfort. I slipped into a spiral of addiction, getting my hands on any substance I could in an effort of feeling anything other than my own present experience. Destruction led to no avail. I think of the moments spent curled up in a ball unable to catch my breath. Each inhale felt like knives piercing me from the inside out like a fathomless betrayal. I could not trust being alive. Death felt like the only solace. I needed to escape.

Perhaps I was really craving a deconstruction, to spill out from a mold I was never meant to take shape to. If I had learned anything over the last decade, it is that the way out is not rambling towards death. The way out is to step fully into life. And somehow, admitting to life is tremendously harder than honestly saying I want to die.



safety

novalunosis (n.) : the state of wonderment experienced only while gazing upon stars.

For just one millisecond it could be hoped for to step outside of oneself entirely, to escape the continuum of time and space that confine within defiable bounds. When fully engulfed in the trance of the Universe showing herself in pure astoundment, it is almost as though the world turns off for just an instant. Nothing else is present except for the exact moment of now. When thinking of ineffable moments, not much else compares to walking beneath the bright cyan glow of the Milky Way galaxy from the high altitude of the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. The night is silent except for tiny tree frogs sounding like ping-pong balls echoing back and forth to one another.

Following such experience, the second most magickal moment of my existence thus far was during a night in Uvita, Costa Rica. Walking down to the ocean in the warm air of midnight presents me with a waking dream state. The tide is low enough to create a sandy landscape that seems to stretch for miles before reaching the vast Pacific. Not one other human is on the beach; what feels like an entire empty realm to imprint anew with each footstep. A finely thin film of water brushes just over the surface of the sand, forming a smooth, soft shimmering of gloss. Memory serves that this night is a full moon in Virgo.

The moon projects a spotlight across the entire beach, making it look like it is daylight out with a shadowed filter of purple hue. Coconut palms line the shore with silhouetted mountains bordering behind like guardians. I feel myself walking one foot in front of the other in deliberation, taking in the gentleness of the damp sand as warm as the air. Each grain seems to hold me. The moon casts my shadow visibly alongside, together closing space between solidity and uncertainty as we approach closer to the waves.

The water trails deeper now, warm comforting foam hugging our ankles. I stand there in the mighty embrace of the Pacific and watch the glowing clouds begin to fade out. I turn around to face the army of trees and mountains on the opposite horizon. The air leaves my lungs at the sight in front of me. The centimeter depth of water covering such an extent of flat sand created a glass mirror effect. With clouds departed, it is as though the entire cosmic sky is reflected on the ground before me. Step after step my shadow and I move out of the rippling rhythms, taking in the beauty of viewing the Universe beneath our feet. We are walking on stars. I turn towards the direction of the reflected full moon so she is in line with my gaze. A trail of rainbow prisms carve a path to her. I am walking forward but in no way getting closer; the sky freezing time. I could walk across the whole coast and still be frozen in stillness. It is as though walking the space inside a mirror right where reflector meets reflected.

This is a close encounter of getting to touch the stars. I am reminded of the face of the Sublime. I am being shown just how thin the veil is to the dream realm. Imaginative idealism is presented in manifest form. In actuality, the reality we are living is the dream state. What lies in what is considered a dream is much more vast than conceptualization can reach. True Reality there awaits.

We can have very real moments of connection wholly on an earthly plane as well. There were moments in the jungle of Guatemala where I would frequently find tarantulas in my bed late at night. Of all the thousands of crevices, structures, and holes to climb in, they not only willingly found their way into my nook on the second floor cabina loft, but felt an urge to approach me. The first couple encounters certainly left feelings of anxiety and resulted in staying awake until the wee hours of the morning. Sleep finally prevailed with a headlamp turned on.

The repeated occurrences started to become intriguing. I almost felt honoured that these usually shy critters felt comfortable enough around me to want to engage. Perhaps they were interested in the geckos and millipedes in the cracks of wood. But just maybe they felt the same invoking curiosity towards me that I do towards the night sky. There is something comforting about absurd uncertainty. In those young hours of the morning, it felt like the two of us were the only ones in existence.

The last encounter with a tarantula involved them walking onto my pillow and giving a hesitant poke at my head. I am not sure what occurred in that transference, but I awoke the next day with the most motivation I have ever felt curated. I picked back up my sixteen unfinished paintings, started on finals for my graduate courses, and felt again inspired to continue writing. The spiders went away after that point. I delved back into my projects, with the gentleness and willingness to follow patience. All gets done as it shall, in the exact time it is meant to. A spider weaves their web, a beautifully expertised craft, and absolutely everything they need comes to them. They can sit in the center and patiently wait for all they substantially require to come right to them.

A tarantula normally burrows into the ground, sensitively tuning into their surroundings. They sense the first slight vibration of a prey walking over their habitat, almost effortlessly obtaining what is needed. These numerous furry critters brought messages each time they visited me. I learned to view them with the same respect as they were viewing me with. It is a gift to have these allies, though boundaries are still imperative. Together we can coexist, learn from one another, and obtain what we need. I gained a reminder of my creativity, intuitive insight, and a warning to be patient. The greatest gift is always unfolding next.

You are that spider who so patiently crafted their web, sitting in centeredness to await all that is needed to come to them as a direct result of their artful labor, only to be squashed for merely existing. You are that dairy cow fearing for her life, as her baby calf just got ripped away from her yet another year, so man may experience one fleeting moment of pleasure. You are that eagle who flies higher than trees, able to see the world from perspective only the heavens could know. You are the hummingbird in flutter of light, who shamelessly tastes all the sweet nectar life has to offer. You are the wolf who howls in devotion to the moon, dancing with shadows that appear more real than reality. You are that firefly who brings luminescence to the dark of night. With such awareness, how could one treat another as anything less than their own Self? Animals are typically considered as a lower form of life. An argument could be made that they are closer to God than human is, because they do not question their existence; they just exist.

The first horse I connected with at a stables I periodically live and work at in the Hudson Valley, New York, was named “Karma”. When I first met her she was skinny to the point of being as narrow as a bike. Her fur was matted in fungus underneath a much too thin blanket, sopping wet from sun-melted snow. She had been sitting outside for weeks in a herd where she fell to the absolute bottom in the pecking order. She would allow the other mares to steal the rest of her food. She did not quite seem to know how she fit in in this newly settled place. Though sweet as can be, allowing connection seemed out of question.

I very quickly took affinity to Karma. Perhaps it was her name alone, or how I somehow related to her introversion being viewed as a point of weakness rather than a loud expression of fortitude. I tended to brushing out her matted fur and treating the fungus that riddled her frail body. I found a thicker blanket for her, purposely a tad bit too big enough to cover more of her neck and lower down past her shoulder. Her demeanor suggested she would have climbed into my lap if not only having been ten times my weight.

I started prepping hot ginger root tea for her and soaking her grain in that to help treat her parasites and stomach issues. As in humans, poor gut health often goes hand-in-hand with states of anxiety. I would stand out in below freezing weather during feeding times to hold a bucket for her and make sure she ate, occasionally flinging harmless snowballs towards the other mares so they would leave her be. The way Karma would ever so slightly look up at me, a pause in chewing, spoke to me more gratitude than I could decipher coming from humans.

Slowly and gently we started working together. Our minds already seemed to mesh as one. We both seemed to be learning what it meant to step into the autonomy of taking up space. Little by little the both of us gained weight from emaciated states. We started testing out what it may be like to stick up for what was rightfully ours. We learned to play. We learned to explore, even when anxious. Most importantly, we learned what it meant to Be. Essentially, is that not the very purpose of karma?

In co-regulating with others, I am learning how to hold space for myself. When sitting with myself in meditation, I behold a moment that bathes me in inspiration. It happens most times I meditate, sometimes

for just a glimpse or other times for a full twenty or forty minutes. I see the most beautifully deep indigo blue appear through the darkness behind eyelids. It starts as a circle and often gets bigger, either engulfing me completely in that colour or shattering out into dissipating indigo stars against a black veil. The very rims of these shapes take on an outline of grey. The visual seems alive, pulsating with my breath and carrying me across an internal solar system.

An indigo blue dot seems so insignificant, yet it leaves with it such a profound feeling. It is a direct connection with the third eye chakra. I feel purely dipped in intuition during these meditative moments. I exist somewhere beneath breath; almost as though what I imagine as the space that lies behind cosmic appearance. Sessions of indigo fill me with the same hope I get from looking up at clear starry night sky, recognizing it is really that I am seeing *out* into the Universe surrounding us. This in turn is reflective of looking into our own ethereal nature. In these glimmers, I feel entirely at Home. In the trance of indigo with silver lining, I meet my inner resource.



neutrality

The trail of trauma has left a cloud of somberness unswept. I am consumed in an ashen existence. I am beneath this world, stuck behind glass in a continuance of survival. I yearn to move into living in a way of thriving. I feel as though I am barely scraping by each day. For now I sit back as an observer to a realm that does not feel mine. I cannot grasp what Home is. I lean more and more into finding this space within myself that can extend out to any external circumstance. I am the connotation of what it means to be Home; we all are.

Rain clouds can be valued the same as rainbows. Dirt may be just as aesthetically pleasing as a waterfall. One side of polarity does not deem more imperative than the other. I can be handed the most extravagant, dream-come-true scenario and I would feel indifferent about it. I have been programmed to think that indifference is not favored. But could not a constant strive for happiness be just as detrimental as aiming for sadness, if not more so? The world by moonlight tells vitalizing stories just the same as daylight does. When speaking of peace it is referring to indifference. There is no good or bad, right or wrong. There simply is. Being neutral does not have to mean apathetic. Neutrality equates to bliss.

Standing on middle ground is a reoccurring aspect of yogic practice. In relation to yoga and my own healing journey, the extent to which I could share feels innately effortless. The topic seems to flow from my Being in autonomic emanation. An air of lightness is equally matched in weight of dread. Yoga, and yogic philosophy specifically, has been the only thing that has provided me with any solace in healing through Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD). In grave summary, yoga for me is suicide prevention.

When speaking to my own experience with C-PTSD, my nervous system tends to get stuck in a functional freeze response. There are definitely moments of panicked hyperarousal too, oftentimes oscillating between the two extremes or usually feeling both at once. This entails wanting to run and hide, yet quickly recognizing that the

thing I am trying to run from is my own self. Thus, for the most part, my system is in freeze mode, stuck on “off”. There is no provided escape. What this manifests like is a disengagement with life; a sort of chronic tiredness that is not fixed by sleep.

Having experienced prolonged and severe trauma since before I could walk, all my nervous system has ever known is a state of dysregulation. It is to the point where perceiving any ounce of safety is somehow more triggering than perceiving threat, perhaps because it is so unfamiliar. Simply becoming aware of breath is overwhelming since it is a reminder that I am alive. My own experience could be of reference in displaying how working with the breath is enough to ignite a PTSD flashback. How am I to exist in a world where the sheer notion of being alive brings with it a crushing weight of grief?

Existential crisis parallels insight. Subjective emergency serves as an emergence of soul. When all is stripped away, we are left with the core of our Being. While studying ancient Hindu texts in a philosophy class during undergraduate coursework, I was unknowingly practicing *jñāna* yoga. All of a sudden I had words and written metaphors for a way I had viewed the world. Philosophy served as my gateway into yoga. Perceiving the world as unreal was really speaking to hyperawareness of more elusive states. I seemed to see something so entirely beneath where my eyes were looking.

It is becoming okay that I do not feel I fit into the world because I know I had a place within my own essence. I often get lost in a variance of maladaptive daydreaming, where clouds overhead feel more grounding than the soil under my feet. I walk through life as if contained behind glass. Everything has always felt distant, including words directly spoken to me. I am not quite here, yet not entirely in a realm of there. I could never seem to catch my footing. It is as though I crash-landed into a vessel that no one gave me the controls for. Every fiber of my body is in constant pain, my joints especially carrying the weight of psychological agony that could be dropped if only I were to allow gravity to carry it for me. I feel homesick for a place that does not tangibly exist.

Whilst submerged in a yogic practice, I feel as though I am dancing across the Cosmos without ever having to move a foot. It is the only moment I feel a sense of complete freedom in choice and utter acceptance, viewing all exactly as it is. Intense neutrality there equates

to blissfulness. I find myself sitting in a space of trillions and trillions of stars with nothing to do but simply Be. I feel I am between realms, but am completely balanced there in yoga. A release ensues in observing from this place of the silent witness. Yoga offers a break from the disconnect of dissociative episodes. For just a moment, I am able to settle into the idea and expression of pure connection.

It is common to interpret the body as an access point into deeper states of human experience. For me, it has very much so been the opposite approach. Connecting to the core of my soul has allowed me an entry point, albeit still a narrow glimpse, into my body. Embodiment in my understanding is not about the physical body. It is a coming into oneself physically, emotionally, neurologically, mentally, psychologically, psychically, intuitively, and spiritually; to exist as one integrated Being. I thus find a term far more fitting is *embeingment*. This is coming Home within one's skin; both the end and beginning of a journey of transformation.

It has been less than 5 years since yoga found me. This has been a play in gently trying to see how much space I could take up within my body without setting off an internal alarm system. These moments are merely an attempt at holding conversation with the entirety of my Being; body, mind, and soul as one unit, all speaking to the topic of security. I am still at the start of this healing journey. I try to get through day by day, sometimes moment by moment. It is hard to sleep at night knowing that the next day I will have to wake up. But I have space. Even for just those one or two hours a day, when confined by the immaterial bounds of my yoga mat, I have infinite space. Often trickling through the seams of everyday lived experience, it is somehow enough to keep going; if nothing else by pure curiosity.

Very recently I have learned that while guiding others through trauma-sensitive yogic sessions, I have never felt more clarity that this is exactly what I am meant to be doing. This work feels so resonating, like I was born to do it. I envisioned myself last semester bringing trauma-informed yoga into treatment centers and I am currently doing exactly that. I sense myself furthering establishing through lived experience a trade between yogic counselling and mental health counselling, encompassing scope of both and neither. This sort of work speaks to my own overcoming of, and working through, experience of C-PTSD. Ultimately these yogic healing sessions are a creation of safe


space. There is room to sit with grief and have it feel okay to do so. There is permission to realize and live out one's dream. Having gone through decades of trauma has given me the embodied wisdom and compassion to be able to do this work. I am grateful for my understanding. I am grateful for my clients serving as my greatest teachers. I am grateful for running towards the very thing I have always wanted to run away from: myself.

Feeling entirely disconnected perhaps makes one want to reach for connection. Yoga is the very act of doing so. I have yet to figure out fully if this requires stepping in or escaping from. There could be a blending of polarities to breed anew, or a dropping of both sides entirely. Hereon lies a novel beginning as comes a closing; contingencies awaiting to be uncovered beneath freshly accumulated piles of ash.




Sample 50-90min session plan:


*Trauma-informed
Transformative
Yogic Practice*

pratipaksha bhavana - Mind 


- Cultivation of opposite attitude

pranayama - Breath 

- Awareness of breath
- Extended exhale to activate PNS

asana - Body 

- Gentle postures for grounding and calming

Integrative Restoration - Soul 

- Meditation technique
- Innate sense of well-being

Sample 12-week program of therapeutic yoga for C-PTSD uncover, held at an inpatient/outpatient treatment center setting:

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 1: Settling | <p>Introduction, discussion on the philosophy of yoga, musculoskeletal, breath, and psychological assessments, setting of intentions</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 2: Heartfelt Mission | <p>Stating intentions, check-in, practice of belly breathing with extended exhalation, gentle <i>asana</i> practice, iRest to tune into one's journey</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 3: Intention | <p>Introduction of three-part yogic breath, gentle <i>asana</i> practice, setting a <i>mantra</i> affirmation, iRest to welcome intention into one's body and mind</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 4: Inner Resource | <p>Three-part yogic breath (if accessible) with extended exhale, gentle <i>asana</i> practice, reciting one's chosen affirmation, guided iRest meditation to establish a safe space within the body and/or mind to return to</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 5: Bodysensing | <p>Slow and mindful <i>asana</i> practice synchronizing breath with movement, iRest to welcome sensations of the body without judgement</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 6: Breathsensing | <p>Three-part yoga breath (if accessible) with extended exhale, short <i>asana</i> practice with <i>ujjayi</i> breath, iRest to feel into the natural sensation of breath at the nostrils and in the abdomen rising and falling</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 7: Opposite of Emotion | <p>Gentle <i>asana</i> practice, iRest to welcome emotions and notice where they are present in the body, yogic counselling to debrief (process further with psychotherapist)</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 8: Observing of Thinking | <p>Check in with applied yogic philosophy practices, meditation to witness thoughts in simple observation to welcome any images or memories that come into mind, yogic counselling</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 9: Joy | <p>Reciting of <i>mantra</i>, gentle <i>asana</i> practice with <i>ujjayi</i> breath, iRest to allow bliss to emanate through oneself with each breath</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 10: Awareness | <p>Gentle <i>asana</i> practice with <i>ujjayi</i> breath, iRest meditation to dissolve into awareness (being mindful of risk of dissociation)</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 11: Wholeness | <p>Full guided iRest session, yogic counselling (process further with psychotherapist)</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 12: Integration | <p>Wrap up, reflections, revisit any practice the client feels called to</p> |

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