

Psoma Yoga

Hi! I'm Donna Martin and I teach an integration of yoga with Hakomi which is a method of somatic therapy based on "assisted self discovery" using little self study experiments done in "embodied mindfulness". This approach is what I call psoma yoga therapy (psoma comes from soma, body, and ps, as in psyche, mind/spirit; psoma = body, mind, spirit)... the style comes from over fifty years of practicing and teaching yoga and thirty years of practicing and teaching Hakomi.

The latest research in neuroscience totally supports the power of mindfulness as a tool for self awareness and transformative healing. This is a way of revealing how our memories and beliefs are organizing our experience, without spending a lot of time on old stories or dwelling on painful feelings. This allows for a shift in the way we embody those narratives and our coping strategies. Understanding our embodied experience paves the way for healing change, not by thinking or talking about ourselves but rather by accessing new ways to be embodied. Doing so changes the impact of old beliefs on our sense of self and reality.

What I'm practicing and teaching now with psoma yoga therapy is how our old reactions and beliefs are embodied in postural or tension patterns or in habitual gestures or facial expressions, and how any change in the way we see ourselves or the world must show up first as a change in our "embodiment".

As a yoga teacher I became interested in how some postural habits would change simply from a regular yoga practice but others remained entrenched. Why would someone walk out of the yoga class with an upright and relaxed way of moving and return the next time back in an old pattern of collapse or rigidity? What kept some tension habits in place while others seemed more willing to relax? Was there a deeper meaning to the way people characteristically stood or moved or expressed themselves that resisted the invitation to change to something more efficient and relaxed?

When I'm using psoma yoga with someone, for example, I help them study what goes on in their body when they think about a stressful situation or relationship or describe a coping reaction.

We explore in mindfulness, and collaborate with curiosity and not judgement, not trying to fix or correct anything but noticing their moment to moment experience. Then we experiment with little changes...maybe head position, or something like eyebrows, maybe the way the arms or hands are held, maybe breathing...while still considering the situation.

Sometimes the first "experiment" is to study the old pattern mindfully, perhaps slowing it down or slightly exaggerating it to learn more about it. It becomes clear as we do this how much experience changes when a habitual way of being embodied becomes more conscious and we explore alternatives, not as corrections, but simply as other possibilities.

Teaching yoga asana I don't want to suggest, verbally or with my hands, that someone change the way they are doing it. Any verbal offering from me is an invitation to self study. I want to help them become more aware. If the back is rounding in downward dog, I might invite the person to round a little more, on purpose, and then to stop doing it intentionally, and to repeat this several times. The result might be a natural and spontaneous shift in the direction of lengthening the back. It could be that the habit simply becomes more conscious, which is the first stage of any choice or change.

The principle is that even a gentle suggestion of a correction or fix has a quality of violence. It tends to invite resistance when we even gently push ourselves or someone else to change.

Through this kind of experimental and mindful exploration, what often emerges is a new discovery, a realization or insight about an old pattern and an awareness of a new possibility, a resource, or simply the freedom that comes from having choice. Finally, I watch for how that new freedom is embodied so that I can help them become really aware of the connection between their discovery and something very tangible which becomes a simple access route to this new choice and freedom.

What perpetuates unnecessary suffering from an old habit or way of being is not so much what we're doing or not doing, but how unconscious the habit is. Consciousness is choice and choice is freedom. Essentially what is possible with this psoma yoga approach is a shift from being reactive - in an old habitual, unconscious knee jerk way - to being resourceful, resilient, and responsive - able to calmly recognize present experience as it is and to choose a creative and effective response that changes experience and invites a whole new nourishing reality.