

## Deborah Kell, YJ M.F.T, C.Y.T

9 Soledad Drive, Suite C, Monterey, CA 97940

### Reclaiming Your Body: Yoga and Trauma Yoga Center of Carmel, July 16, 2011

- Emotional trauma results from an event or series of events that overwhelms one's normal coping mechanisms, threatens the life or physical/psychological integrity of oneself or someone close, and which one feels helpless to prevent or control. Unable to "fight or flee", the mind-body system cannot rebalance.
- The sequelae of unprocessed trauma are physiological as well as psychological, creating destructive patterns of thinking, feeling, relating and behaving. *These patterns become lodged in the body. One's biography becomes one's biology.*
- The demands, stresses and losses of everyday life can cumulatively result in physiological/neurological patterns similar to those of trauma. Any individual, when sufficiently aroused, can respond in a similar manner. Those with high temperamental sensitivity are particularly at risk.
- *To be effective in relieving the mind-body symptoms of trauma, there must be body experiences that contradict and gradually replace the trauma pattern.*
- Yoga, which creates balance on all levels, offers an unparalleled opportunity to address the symptoms of trauma by providing body-mind experiences which allow one to:

- ... practice being in the present moment
- ... safely connect with the body
- ... learn to breathe, and eventually to control the breath
- ... befriend the body and experience it as a resource
- ... learn self-regulation and how to turn the stress response off
- ... develop a sense of mastery
- ... make choices and practice taking effective action
- ... develop strong foundation, center and mental focus
- ... become mindful and steady in the face of fear
- ... have the structure and support of a regular practice

- A trauma-sensitive yoga class creates a safe healing experience by incorporating the following:
  - ... Environment: quiet, private, plenty of space
  - ... Permission to leave, ask question, modify, refrain
  - ... Teacher qualities: present, light, welcoming, modest dress, pays attention
  - ... Language: invitational, inquiring -- moving from demand to curiosity
  - ... Exercises: simple, clear description, slow pacing, build slowly, offer modification
  - ... Assists: no physical assist, or "opt in"
  - ... Props: lots of props but no straps

- **In** addition to asanas, trauma sensitive yoga offers a host of other healing and balancing practices: breathing practices, mudras, chanting, yoga nidra or "sleep"/relaxation, mindfulness.
- **In** addition, integrating components of complementary movement techniques such as Tai Chi, Qi Gong, energy/ acupuncture-based techniques, and Trauma Releasing Exercises can enhance trauma recovery.

*A word of caution: Yoga and other body-based techniques are not a replacement for professional medical or psychological treatment of trauma. These practices can be powerful. If there is any practice that does not feel right for you, or that brings up intense or overwhelming emotions, please stop right away and seek appropriate professional help. If you are working with a health or mental health professional, please decide together if yoga or any other practice is appropriate for you.*

**Enjoy your practice!**