

NAME

Yoga and Embodied Movement Audio.mp3

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START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:00]**

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation, so a few weeks ago, a friend of mine got some news that nobody wants to get these days. He found out that his family had been exposed to covid-19. They had all been in close contact with someone who they knew was now sick.

[00:00:25]

So whatever their plans were for that day, they got dropped and my friend rushed to figure out how and where to get himself and his partner and his kids all tested for the virus. They were juggling three different insurance plans and contradictory information, he said, from really well-meaning health care professionals who were just trying to do their best.

[00:00:52]

But it was frustrating.

[00:00:56]

And scary.

[00:01:00]

They're all OK now, but they didn't know that then, and I'm aware, as I tell this story, that odds are some of you have had this exact same thing happen to you. I know some of you have or maybe this story feels a little bit like your experience just in recent days, trying to figure out where to get a coronavirus vaccine. But my friend told me the whole day was just a blur.

[00:01:28]

He said it was Blur's day, but not in a usual pandemic, Blur's day kind of way. It wasn't a numb, dull, boring, fuzzy kind of day stuck within the same walls. This one, he said, was an anxious, frantic Blur's day.

[00:01:45]

He said, I've decided that one is not better than the other.

[00:01:50]

They're just different kinds of blurs. The one thing that helped you noticed was his family, his regular practice.

[00:02:00]

At dinnertime, they pulled a frozen pizza out of the oven finally at about eight p.m. and they sat down and they began the simple practice that they do together every night as they sit around the dinner table, they each share something that they are grateful for from that day.

[00:02:20]

And he said it wasn't anything that was said. There wasn't any profound gratitude expressed that shifted his case of the Blur's.

[00:02:27]

It was just a simple rhythm of doing the thing that they have done hundreds and hundreds of times before, of realizing, OK, we made it, we made it back to this moment, to this anchor, and he noticed his body settling his heart rate, slowing his breathing a little easier.

[00:02:55]

In that moment, he realized instead of projecting out into the future and trying to plan or remembering the chaos of the day, all he was thinking about was that he was still here and he was alive with the people that he loves.

[00:03:13]

Our message series this winter Coming Home. It is a way of reminding us all that spiritual practices really can do this when we are able to find a practice that works for us and commit to it.

[00:03:32]

Just like Chris Groppe said last week, not with perfection, but with honesty and regularity and intention, we can find some peace and clarity even on the bloodiest and scariest days. And we've heard so far in the series about different kinds of practices that you might try practices that help us grow our generosity or experienced life mindfully, practices that can help us create and kind of get what's inside of us out on paper. And over the next few weeks, we're going to explore practices for meal times and nourishment for reading.

[00:04:12]

Today, we're going to try a practice of movement and embodiment. That's why I'm in my comfy clothes for this message.

[00:04:22]

Now, I try to be careful any time I say that anything about us is universal. But one thing I can actually say with certainty is that all of us who are here this morning have a body.

[00:04:34]

Personally, for most of my life. Maybe this is true for some of you. I always associated that word, talking about the body or my body, any conversation about the body I associate it with how the body looks on the outside or how it performs. Right. Talking about my body always connected back for me to the external thing, what other people saw. And so when I thought or talked about movement practices or tried them out like dancing, exercising for me, they all became things where I didn't even notice. But I was so preoccupied with doing it right, with how my form was, with how it looked on the outside, rather than with the internal sensation of movement itself.

[00:05:26]

And that's what that word embodied, if you haven't heard it before, really means it's about being in our bodies.

[00:05:33]

An embodied spiritual practice helps us remember that this body really is our home. But everything that we experience in this life starts within and lives at the edges of our bodies. It can be a really empowering thing in a world that often tells us what's on the outside of our bodies is what really matters to take back our experiences of our own bodies and appreciate ourselves from the inside out rather than standing back and looking back from the outside in.

[00:06:18]

Now, there are a lot of different ways to try out embodied movement practices and a lot of different practices to you might have heard of a field called Cymatics that's become more popular in recent years. It's from the Greek word, Soma for the body. It's being incorporated into research by a lot of therapists, people who've got books out right now that a lot of you are reading, people like Bessel van der Coke Rezman Menicum, both of whom study how the body holds trauma and how our emotions show up in our bodies over time.

[00:06:52]

And embodiment is present in spiritual practices. Of course, the practice of the whirling dervish in Sufi Islam, there are Buddhist forms of walking meditation that are all about embodied movement.

[00:07:04]

There are Christian practices like tracing or moving through a labyrinth, but also there are more mundane, everyday spiritual practices that we may not think of as embodied, but are all about that connection with our physical selves, the postures of prayer in Islamic tradition, the practice of taking communion in a Christian church, whether they're religious or secular. All of these practices have in common that the movement is not just about the physical work of moving the body. It's a movement that connects us to our inner experiences and to that experience of something greater than ourselves, whether that's God or the Earth or community or connection for you, just something greater that holds us, literally holds our bodies. So I'm going to turn this message over actually in a few minutes. I thought about trying to walk you through an embodied movement practice myself, but it seemed a little silly considering, you know, about 10 percent of Wellspring's members are yoga teachers.

[00:08:15]

I thought I would turn this message over to a wellspring or who has real experience in this. Many of you know, Gil Alba, who has been teaching a particular kind of movement practice for decades and who has led small groups and retreats here at Wellspring's. Gael is a yoga teacher. And when I say the word yoga, I feel like I can already hear some of you. Right. Some of you some of you have already got your crystal quartz points arranged and you're ready on your mat. You're all set to go. You're excited. And then some of you are like, oh, yoga. OK, I guess it's time to make lunch. Now, when it comes to yoga, you might be, you know, on team love the pants, not the practice. Or maybe you have tried yoga and you think you're not good at it or maybe the opposite. You've tried yoga and you feel like it's slow and it's boring and it's touchy feely. You know, it's funny.

[00:09:11]

In his book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, Rezma Minicam, who I mentioned before, is a therapist. He says if this stuff sounds touchy feely, that's because it is touchy feely. Right. And body practices are about touch and sensation and getting out of our heads. This past year, we have lived in our heads a lot, even more than usual. We spend so much of our times, our time literally as talking heads like this on screens.

[00:09:44]

These days, when our bodies are vulnerable, when we feel physical threats for so many different reasons, we need these gentle and compassionate ways to tend to our bodies more than ever.

[00:10:01]

So before I turn it over to Gael, I will say, if you are a yoga skeptic, I was with you for most of my life until I realized how limited my understanding of yoga really had been, mostly by the fitness industry, which is how most Americans have come to know anything about yoga.

[00:10:23]

If you're curious to learn more about this, I recommend checking out a podcast that another Wellspring's member turned me on to *Called Yoga is Dead*. It's hosted by two Indian American yoga teachers, Bajo Patel and Jessell Parik. And it's sort of an uncovering of how yoga wound its way through both the fitness industry and then later kind of a consumer spirituality industry in America and in the process, yoga got farther and farther away from the fullness of the ancient practice in South Asia.

[00:11:00]

The yoga that you might learn at a gym or even a typical yoga studio is typically an athletic sized version of just one part of the yoga practice. It's the asanas that's the Sanskrit word for pose, right?

[00:11:17]

Asana is just one part of the eight different parts or eight limbs, as you'll hear Gael say, of yoga and yoga is really an entire way of life that tries to help us unify what we experience in our bodies and in our thoughts and in that connection to something larger or greater.

[00:11:41]

So just be aware, if you are a yoga skeptic that go into a yoga class and saying, I've tried yoga, I didn't like it.

[00:11:48]

It's sort of like taking communion at a Catholic church and saying, I tried religion. I didn't like it.

[00:11:55]

Right. There's a lot more to religion as a category and there's also a lot more to yoga.

[00:12:03]

So Gael is going to give you a little taste of that more today.

[00:12:09]

I'll give you a moment to change into your comfy clothes if you haven't already. And of course, if you would just like to observe the practice, that's fine.

[00:12:17]

But if you do try our embodied practice today, I really encourage you to try to think of it a little bit differently, to not push yourself, to not worry about getting it right. One of the nice things about being at home right now is that nobody else can see you. Right. Just notice what feels good in your body as you move notice and get curious about whether any of the movements help you feel calm or grounded or more alive.

[00:12:53]

That's what we need right now. I'll let I'll take it from here.

[00:13:01]

Oh, and be aware that you may see me on screen from time to time, because I'm going to do girls practice along with you so you can see what it looks like to do it imperfectly and also so you can see what it looks like to modify it for sitting in a chair is going to be on the floor.

[00:13:17]

And so you can feel a little less alone, if that's helpful for you.

[00:13:23]

Thank you, Reverend Lee. Hi, everyone, I'm Gil Alba, and I'm going to bring you some tools and techniques drawn from the eight limbs of yoga. The word yoga itself means to yoga or bring together the powers of body, mind and spirit power. And that is it brings a coherence into our everyday experience that all the parts of us are moving in the same direction. I'm going to do today's physical practice from the floor. I invite you to come on down with me either on a straight floor.

[00:14:07]

If you have a mat, that would be great. I'll give you a minute to to get it and get set up. If sitting on the floor doesn't feel really great for you and you need to be bolstering a pillow is one that I often use. But you see it right in the middle of the pillow or a straight back chair. They're all great. I'm going to sit in the middle of my mat just like so you are going to cross your legs however it works for you. Much of what the eight limbs of yoga really teaches is about ways of being. Practices that we can do in our mind and for our hearts. So the first thing that we recognize is that you do the best you can with your body. The point of doing anything at all with your body is to sort of get it out of the way for the rest of what you're up to. And by getting it out of the way, we do that by taking care of it, by changing it, by massaging it into ways of being that create ease in the ease, there is self care and self-love. So this is all part of the mind, body, spirit, practice. So you've got yourself settled in. I might go a little off frame here. No bother. You'll understand what I'm doing. You're seated and you feel as comfortable as you can be right in the middle of your body.

[00:15:46]

Your spine is uplifted. Nice and tall. Your shoulders are down. Let your head just rest in the middle of your body, neither too far forward nor back side to side. And be aware that you have become aware of how you're feeling. Sitting up straight with your legs crossed is in yoga, and Asana one, only one of the eight limbs that we draw from in our daily practice, everything that we do that's movement is going to be underneath the limb of Asana. So I'm going to invite you to take your arms and stretch them way, way up tall, as tall as you can, and feel your aliveness all the way to the tips of your fingers. Notice that you're breathing. I'm going to use my right arm and take it down to the side as I bring myself over, stretching the whole of my waist and shoulder and upper arm all the way to the tips of the fingers. And then if you can look up. Why didn't your elbow and breathe? Allow yourself to know that you are opening up possibility on the left side of your body, on the left side of your being, that you can see further and be more simply through the stretch, exhale, arm down, arms up to the sky. Same idea. Bring the hand down to the side. And reach turning the face, look up toward the elbow and feel the stretch all the way from your seat, up to the tips of your fingers breathing in and breathing out.

[00:18:18]

The simplicity of the hold allows you buy time to settle into something that's probably new for you in this day, even though it isn't difficult or complicated. This is something that we normally do. So you might be finding places in your body that you are not in touch with before you did the stretch. And that really is the point. Coming back to center, going to take our hands. You can fold them like this or like so and bring them under your chin. Breathing in. Your elbows go up.

[00:18:58]

Breathing out your elbows, come down, drop your chin to chest. We'll do that four times, breathing in.

[00:19:09]

And now.

[00:19:13]

Again, in and out.

[00:19:21]

Again, in and out, my eyelids tend to drop closed yours, might as well, last time in. And out, drop your arms.

[00:19:40]

Breathing in and breathing out. Still sitting in your Asana, your breathing is pranayama, another entire limb, but anchored to something so simple as a breath that invites you to take lifeforce in as deeply as you can and then release it all the way out. I'm going to ask you to put your hands to your knees and create a circle with your body.

[00:20:13]

So you're creating a moving Asana.

[00:20:17]

And you're breathing and you're feeling and you're feeling yourself here.

[00:20:33]

Ramdas, as a teacher, you might have heard of, and he wrote a book that had a saying, Be here now. It's really a big part of this practice to be here now and to be here in a way that releases judgment, and for me, the releasing of the judgment is the biggest part of the practice. Releasing judgment is the biggest part of the practice. There are yamas in yoga, another limb. There are a whole series of practices that we undo, things non doing's one of the Yamas that's a non doing, it's a practice of nonviolence. And I'm going to bring that onto the mat today for us. What is the most nonviolent way that you can be told yourself in your practice?

[00:21:37]

I'm going to invite you to lift the spine, as we did before, turn from your waistline toward one of your thighs. You're sitting in a chair. It's going to look different. But up here, it looks the same. You've turned your body toward one of

your thighs and you're going to bring your belly toward that thigh. That's going to look different than dropping your head.

[00:22:05]

You stay uplifted, you bring your belly toward your thigh and you're breathing in and you're holding that posture. Some of you can go all the way down. If I do that, I'll go off frame. That's OK. You can see that the back is flat as you can make it, and you're wherever you can be, you're going to hold that and breathe for a moment. So the practice of ahimsa or nonviolence, which we often think of as being nonviolent to the world outside of us, something that most of us. It would simply be part of us, we wouldn't wish to be violent to the world outside, but I'm inviting us on the mat to really look at what's going on inside of our minds. And an act of nonviolence toward yourself in your yoga practice means that you are clearly an absolutely in love with yourself in the way that you can be in the movement right now. Your breathing, your fullest breath, it's filled with life and you're happy with that. It is your maximal ability in this moment and you allow yourself to be happy with that. And if you are so relaxed and so release that your movement is all the way down wherever you can imagine it to be.

[00:23:31]

That's great. But you still have more to go. And the ahimsa of the mind, where can you go and release yourself from judgment? So I bring you back up with that back into the center of your body, because we're going to go to the other side in a moment. About you to do this circle again round and round and maybe your loser. I'm going to put in parentheses here for those of you that have, oh, long term. Stuck places. In my own body, it was my low back for many years. It is no longer my back and I can only credit the simple movements like this, spinal rotations and spinal twists that unlocked the experience of pain in my back, even though my x rays will still tell you that it didn't really fix itself at all. But I'm not in the perception of pain because my body moves freely and this is something that you can do for you. So you come back to the center of your experience and you lift your body up and you turn your core toward that opposite, like breathing in, lifting up, breathing out flat, back very flat back, pressing body toward the thigh.

[00:25:05]

You might be coming down a little bit, you might be coming down a lot.

[00:25:11]

A side note, I feel my body adjust already mentioned my lower back. I feel the adjustments. It sounds like a little bit of a quick, quick, quick, quick, quick as I go down inch by inch. And you may find that for yourself. Something unwinding some of the fuzz that collects around our adjuncts where muscle meets bone.

[00:25:40]

Just releasing and you're breathing in and out. And again, I invite you. What's going on in your mind? The practice of ahimsa is the nonviolence toward yourself, but what might you put in its stead? I blast. Breathing in, breathing out.

[00:26:22]

The universe has my back breathing in, breathing out.

[00:26:33]

I am appreciative of all that I am breathing and breathing out and allowing yourself to come back up again, sitting in the middle of your circle.

[00:26:52]

I'm going to ask you to put your hands behind. You are on the sides wherever you can adjust yourself that you're feeling balanced. I'm going to take our legs up and out, see if you can do it by contracting and supporting your movement with your belly up and out.

[00:27:14]

Shifting weight, lifting the rib cage up.

[00:27:20]

Similarly to what we did on each side. We're going to bend forward. This is just called the seated forward flexion. That's the Ossana, the movement. The breath is a deep, balanced breath, the same that you've been doing, breathing in and breathing out and let your body come down as close as you can, belly toward the thighs. I'm giving you this one, because for most of us, this is a practice that you can bring with you. Over time. Your belly will get closer to your thighs, your heart will get closer to your knees and your chin will get closer to your shins with time. It's rather fun to bring this to your mat every day and see how long it will take before where you are today is simply no longer. You'll be further further forward in a rather short amount of time if you simply give yourself the time to do the practice.

[00:28:26]

So with that in mind, coming back up, we're going to bring our legs back into cross position comes overhead behind you are on opposite leg.

[00:28:41]

Turn toward the back and breathe.

[00:28:45]

Going to invite you to simply know that we can count eight counts and each of these movements, you can do that to keep your own point of focus coming back. I'm up around and behind you.

[00:29:10]

Give yourself a little eight count going back to center a last breathing technique.

[00:29:24]

We're only going to do this a couple of times, but I invite you to take about five minutes after this practice. And when you're on your own two fingers at the base of your eyebrows, the ring finger and the thumb are tamps breathe in through your left.

[00:29:43]

It's called alternate nostril breathing tap. Breathe out through your right now and again through your right to breathe out through your left and left. Tap out right in right, tap left again and left, tap out right. Out in, right.

[00:30:30]

Tamp and release, alternate nostril breathing, you can look up some of the science of it connects left body side to right brain functioning right body, side to left brain functioning. It is the most magnificent tool for creating emotional balance, something so simple. All that I released is released from me, all that I need I bring toward me and you balance that left side and right.

[00:31:16]

The last thing that I want to share with you is a little bit on this day.

[00:31:23]

The limb of Naoma is a limb that invites us to add rituals of practice, and I would invite you to what are your rituals of practice, the ones that we did today and ones that might come forward from what we did today. And the one I want to give you is Steyr. Non stealing, and it is the nyama that invites us. In non stealing to not steal from others. The the piece that I'm going to bring forward is the not stealing of piece. To just not be about stealing other people's peace, but in that same Nehama is the non stealing of your own peace, the non stealing of your own peace. I truly wish to leave you with that, to practice that and whatever any of these practices have meant to you. It can be fun if you share them in the comments. Which one works for you? We're still innocent. While I'm speaking, you can repeat something that we did today or add something else on to your practice when we're still here. And I want to read to you a little bit. One of the books that I'm reading, one of many dying to be me, Anita Marciani.

[00:32:53]

By expanding our awareness on an individual level, we will be effecting change on a universal level. Each one of us is like a single thread in a huge tapestry woven in a complex and colorful pattern. And we may be only one strand, but we are all integrated in the finished image. We affect the lives of others just by choosing whether or not to be our true selves, our obligation to others. Our only purpose is to express our uniqueness and allow others to do the same. Realizing that the light, the magnificent universal energy is within us and in us will change us.

[00:33:43]

Because we are open and ready. That doesn't express the essence of no day, I don't know what does.

[00:33:55]

So the spirit in me season salutes the spirit in you enjoy your practices and I send your blessings.

[00:34:04]

Namaste.

[00:34:09]

Gael, thank you so much.

[00:34:13]

I want to invite us all to close out our practice this morning by taking a moment to join me in the spirit of prayer. Maybe you want to close your eyes and rest. Relax your shoulders, back your head.

[00:34:35]

God, who formed us.

[00:34:39]

Who created all of the matter and material that is in this whole universe and in our bodies?

[00:34:50]

May we feel that electricity? When days are blurry or scary. When the world seems big and we seem small and

numb inside. Maybe we remember that our bodies are literally connected to everything else, that we are made up of the same stuff as the moon and the stars and the trees and the people around us. And may we remember when we feel that real vulnerability of our body is that tenderness, even the threats to our safety and our health? May we remember that we can practice noticing and appreciating and loving a different story within our own bodies when where we are alive and at rest and safe one where we know that we are whole, just as we are, and where this moment and this body can feel like enough.

[00:36:06]

For these prayers, I've spoken out loud and for the prayers each of these people with us this morning carries on our hearts with our men.

[00:36:16]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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