

From pain to gain:

by Tiziana Stupia

How a back injury led me on the most exciting journey of my life



When I was 32, I injured my back in a martial arts accident. The injury, though minor, was slow to heal and became chronic, so that I was unable to walk for longer than one hour at a time without debilitating pain. I visited physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, and every healer under the sun, with negligible results. I had X-rays and MRI scans, but they revealed nothing other than a scoliosis I'd had since birth. The pain remained, and my search for healing continued. My back injury was followed by an emotional breakdown about a year later, triggered by a chaotic relationship. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me. In the years to follow, a most incredible journey unfolded as a direct result of my perceived misfortune.

In early 2007, three years after my accident, a friend talked me into going on a retreat in Sri Lanka. Whilst the relatively brief stay didn't help my back problem, my interest in yoga, which was a part of the healing program, was sparked. I'd practiced different types of yoga before, but never deeply enough for it to have any real effects. Back in Leamington Spa, I enrolled in a 6-month training intensive with the British Wheel of Yoga that started a week after my return. The course opened up a new and yet strangely familiar world for me. I'd come to find physical ways to heal my back, yet discovered so much more than that – most of all spiritual practices that blew me away with their potency. In the six months, I'd only started to dip my toe into the vast world of yoga, but it was enough for me to start a daily practice that, whilst it didn't cure my back pain completely, managed it reasonably well.

A few months later, I decided to leave everything behind and go on an open-ended

overland trip to Pakistan. Somehow, I ended up in the Indian Himalayas and stayed there for five months. In India, everything fell into place for me. I began living in a yoga ashram that taught very serious spiritual practices and placed great emphasis on a sattvic (pure) vegetarian diet and sattvic ways of living. This made great sense to me, as I'd often observed that people in the West look at yoga as a form of exercise that provides some relaxation. Not much attention is paid to a healthy lifestyle that supports the yoga practice.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I became interested in Ayurveda, an ancient healing path from India, soon after. Ayurveda looked like it had all the answers. It concerned itself with all aspects of life: diet, lifestyle, yoga, meditation, cleansing practices, and healing herbs. The system looks at the person as a unique individual and treats by balancing the doshas – bringing the patient back into balance and perfect health through adjustments of lifestyle and diet. It confirmed what I'd intuitively felt for a long time – that we often don't need medication, but merely a change in how we live our lives and treat our bodies.

Intrigued, I packed my bags once more and left for New Mexico to study at the world-renowned Ayurvedic Institute with an Indian physician called Dr Vasant Lad. In the nine-month long program, I learned



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References:

There are many good books about Yoga and Ayurveda. For Ayurveda, I highly recommend books by Dr Vasant Lad and Dr David Frawley. For Yoga, the books of the Bihar School of Yoga in India are widely available, concise and easy to read.

Websites:

The Ayurvedic Institute
www.ayurveda.com

The British Wheel of Yoga
www.bwy.org.uk

Mandala Yoga Ashram in Wales
www.mandalayoga.net

My personal favourites for yoga therapy are Gillian Russell and Rachel White, because both have healed themselves of chronic health conditions and are now fountains of wisdom.

Yoga Therapist Gillian Russell –
www.yogill.com or phone 01527 857586

Yoga & Meditation teacher around Warwickshire and Shropshire
Rachel White – rachel.white@mac.com
or phone 07403 141965



all the basics of an Ayurvedic lifestyle as well as diagnostic tools and individualized treatment protocols. I learnt about how different foods influence our health and which foods are good for various bodily constitutions. I also studied with Chitra Giaque, a wonderfully gifted yoga teacher and energy healer who cured herself of a malignant tumour, despite predictions that she would die without surgery. Chitra taught me that many chronic ailments result from a lack of 'rasa', fluidity in the body that cause a corruption in the cells and tissues. Through the conscious direction of prana, the life force, these energy blocks can be resolved and healed.

Overall, I found that the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda and Yoga are sensible and empowering tools that help us to help ourselves and achieve maximum physical, mental and emotional health.

Yoga has been pretty miraculous for me. Before I discovered this path, I was an overachiever. I had to be the best, the fastest, the most ambitious and most hard-working woman in the world. I ignored the warning signs of my body and hence became ill. All this is in the past now. Yoga and meditation have made me unhurried in every way: eating, walking, travelling, loving, appreciating life. And the ironic thing is that, through relaxed effort, I now actually achieve more than when I was giving myself a hard time.

Seven years after my original injury, my back pain is almost non-existent. It remains my khavaigunya, Sanskrit for 'weak spot', and is an indicator for emotional stress that sometimes still creeps its way into my life. But overall, I have little trouble. I practice yoga and meditation daily and recently qualified as an AyurYoga teacher.

When I look back at my healing journey now, I am amazed at the unexpected gifts my health challenges brought me. They led me to a magical life of spirituality and healing. Knowing how debilitating and frustrating chronic, seemingly 'incurable' pain can be, it is now an utter joy to assist other people with the simple tools that have

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enriched my life so drastically. Yoga and Ayurveda go to the root – the root cause of disease, rather than smothering it over with quick fix medication. One thing is required, though: determination, and perhaps even desperation to heal, no matter what. It is important to start a daily yoga routine and implement changes in diet and lifestyle. This may sound daunting, but once you start feeling the rewards of a healthy body and mind, the practice becomes a blessing rather than a chore. My daily practice is now the highlight of my day, the rock around which everything else centres. And every day, I feel gratitude for the health challenges that have led me onto this exciting path.

Tiziana Stupia is an Ayurvedic Consultant, Yoga Teacher, Priestess, Writer and passionate traveller. An on/off Leamington Spa resident, she is currently living in Queensland, Australia.

You can find out more by visiting her blog at www.travelblog.org/Bloggers/Travelling-Priestess/ or by e-mailing her at travellingpriestess@gmail.com.

Paneurhythmy: Supreme Cosmic Rhythm

Paneurhythmy is a joyful, meditational exercise-dance originating in Bulgaria, arising from the work of the great spiritual teacher Master Beinsa Douno.

Literally the word Paneurhythmy means 'the movements and rhythms of the universe'. Working with the energies of Nature, paneurhythmy is danced in the landscape, in the mornings, between the spring and autumn equinoxes. The simple, graceful movements each have a deep meaning and healing power on the dancers and on the environment. The dance involves gentle exercise linking our mind and our body, relieving stress and tension, relaxing ourselves physically, emotionally and mentally.

Beinsa Douno consciously linked strongly to the Thracian tradition of the

Orphic Mysteries, which originated in the Bulgarian Rhodope mountains, and which has the central tenant of God is Love and Nature and ourselves, humanity, are created to manifest this love.

Douno envisioned the new Golden Age and created the paneurhythmy to help us to dance into the golden light of the new era in as gentle and harmonious a way as possible. Thus by dancing the paneurhythmy we are connecting with the golden thread of consciousness that weaves between the ages of time and the landscape.

For further information about dancing Paneurhythmy and learning more about the philosophy and dance, please contact Suzy Straw (susan.straw@virgin.net) or Sarah Dawkins (sarah@zoence.co.uk).

Love judges not, is not limited:
It does no harm to anyone.
Its flame is sacred;
it burns all that is impure
Melts all that is pure, and
turns it into gold
– Douno

We will also be dancing on the magical island on Iona next September, full details will be found on the Zoence website in due course: www.zoence.co.uk

For those near London, there is also dancing now in Greenwich Park, near the Observatory, on Saturdays at 7.30/8a.m. and Hyde Park. On Sundays there is dancing in Richmond Park. There is also a yahoo group that people can join: paneurhythmy_uk@yahoo.com.