

Bonus Chapter – Yoga therapy for Stress, Burnout and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

The *Purushārtha*: How our Motivations Cause Stress and Fatigue

‘ “What do you think success is?” Asked the boy. “To love.” said the mole.’ (*The Boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse* 2019 Mackesy)

Most of us react unconsciously to life and what is around us. We operate from our conditioned patterns rather than from our true heart. We are brought up in a certain culture (which currently is a consumer society, a patriarchy and that which prioritises the individual rather than the collective – just to give an example), where we are taught particular things by our parents and teachers and are further influenced by the mass media and our peer group. We seldom stop to question the values of the world that we find ourselves in. Layers of ideas and identities build up to form our protective shell and we usually react to circumstances without thinking about how our conditioning may affect the way that we behave. We particularly tend to identify with what we do for a living. We have little idea of who we might be beyond that. If everyone else is living in the same way then we figure out that this must be the right way to be, so we take on the habits of those around us – even down to the way that we dress. If we become ill, then we can't wait to get back to being 'normal' like everybody else. If we consider some of the *saṃskāras* of someone with profound exhaustion we can see how these may be reinforced by the collective conditioning of the Western world. For most people, it is normal to live life as if everything is urgent. Everyone is always 'doing,

doing, doing' (all that cortisol), as we rush forward into a future which never actually arrives. We find it almost impossible to stop and savour life. On some level we know this is happening and that it isn't doing us any good. Sadly, this way of living has become so normalised, that it is almost impossible not to be part of it. Yet if modern society itself can be said to be dysfunctional, we might ask if it really healthy for us to be living like this too?

Who on earth am I?

Most of us work out a value system based around how we think that we should live and this will usually include having a home, a relationship to provide us with love, a good job and security both for now and for our old age. We chase pleasure and security to 'add' something to us and to make us happy, whilst also trying to be a good person so that we can fit in with everybody else. We tend to be led by what our desires and fears impose upon us. We may even think that our desires are commands that are giving us the right message about what we deserve and about what we should do and what we should have. *What we really want, however, is freedom from these agitating desires,* because when we get what we think we want, this can end up imposing disappointment or attachments upon us. This then reinforces our feeling of *avidyā*: of insecurity.

Because, deep down, we have a core wound of lack, we try to fill this black hole with material things. (Of course, trying to build security - some sort of permanence in life - is really just a construct in our minds. Nothing *can* last). Even our political system is set

up to promote and prioritise financial security and profit over protecting the health and welfare of the people - or the planet. Many of us put our material desires, work ethics and profit before human connection or kindness to others. Seldom do we live consciously, appreciating what is going on right now. Usually we don't question this way of doing things, especially as society, via the media, tells us that this is how we should be living. In fact, the mass media works hard to reinforce our fear about what might go wrong. The irony is, the more materialistic that we become, the more that we become disconnected from the people around us – and from the planet which we see as something separate, rather than as part of us which needs to be nurtured. Yet outward pursuits such as chasing wealth and trying to control relationships seem to fix our feeling of lack, for a short while at least. Until maybe we get ill, or there is a disaster in our lives that stops us short, such as the death of a loved one. With any luck, circumstances that we perceive as being negative may become our greatest teacher simply because then we have no choice but to pay attention and ask serious questions about existence, how we are living and who we really are.

Yoga shows us that we are looking in the wrong direction – that we may, through no fault of our own, have the wrong values in our lives which actually just fuel our feelings of insecurity and lack of self-compassion. These motivations keep us in a continual loop of stress and exhaustion. We can't really help this – we are just doing what everyone else is doing – and what we are programmed to do through the *samskāras* (conditioning) of the world in which we live. To metaphorically step outside our culture and question this way of living will take some dispassion and discrimination

- and a great deal of courage. Yet all our pursuits are really about a search for love and wholeness and a need to feel complete.

The *Puruṣārtha* : Security, Pleasure Virtue and Freedom

Yoga suggests that there are four ideals that motivate us in life. This is called the *puruṣārtha* in Sanskrit. This is a Vedic model

The *Puruṣārtha* is: **Security (*artha*)**, **Pleasure (*kāma*)**, **Duty (*dharma*)** and **Freedom (*mokṣa*)**. We need a little of each of these in order to be happy and to live harmoniously. However, we pursue the first three to the point that we become unbalanced. We do this because we think that chasing security, pleasure and duty will not only add something us - but will also provide us with lasting happiness and love. Actually, what we are really looking for is *freedom* and this is the real meaning of Yoga. Finding freedom is our true purpose in life. But we are searching for it in the wrong place – outside of ourselves - instead of looking for freedom, peace and happiness within.

The first ideal: Security (*Artha*)

As humans, we like to think that we have some idea about what is happening. We find it very difficult to sit with the unknown. Most of us are driven by the need to feel safe and in control. It's what society, via the media and the consumer culture, is based on. The message is that we can never have enough to be secure and that we are always lacking in something, so we need more. And more. I know that this is true because I

used to work in advertising and PR and I was the one selling this idea! The way to get us all to consume and spend more is *fear*. Fear that we won't have enough money in our old age, fear that we don't look good enough, fear that we won't fit in with the people that we want to fit in with, fear that we will be on our own, fear that our home or job isn't glamorous enough – you name it, you know the message. We live in a fear-based culture. This is how the system works - it drives our very economy. This feeds into our feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and so we buy more and more stuff. We are driven to compete with others through fear and desire, just like the marketing people want us to be. On one level we are convinced that having *more* will make us happy because, for a while it seems to work. On another, we know, deep down, that the more we have, the more stressed that we become because the more we have to earn, think about and look after. But wealth and material objects seem to bring about temporary peace of mind. And if money isn't our thing, then we may chase attention, power or even fame to fix the insecurity problem. We can get so caught up in these pursuits that we may become addicted and compulsive in a never-ending search for yet more and then more. But of course, we can *never* have enough to make us feel completely secure.

The trap of possessions

On some level, we truly believe that 'stuff' can protect us and make us happy. But if we buy into this, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment and unhappiness. I read an interview recently with a famous shoe mogul, who is on various rich lists. She explained that she has to keep working harder and harder because she never feels that

she has enough. Many people envy her lifestyle and her unimaginable wealth, which runs into billions of dollars. But is she peaceful and content?

Of course, there is nothing wrong with having some comforts. Certainly, we do need shelter, clothing and food. But the point is; how much do we really need to be secure? Ask yourself this - is security just a concept in your head, something that is subjective? Imagine that you had £5,000 in your bank account and that this was all you had in the world. Now £5,000 may be a fortune to one person and the beginning of poverty to another. It is all a matter of perception. Our relationship with money has very little to do with how much we *actually* have. But it can show us our patterns - it can show us how we *deal* with life. We may have a lot of fear around money - always thinking that we never have enough - or we may pull away from it completely and try not to think about it at all. Ideally of course, it's helpful to be sensible about how we manage our finances without being greedy or grasping, so that we feel that we have abundance and are at ease with whatever we do really have. This is the attitude that we then want to take into all areas of our lives *because how we handle money reflects how we handle our energy*. It is about having an attitude of plenitude and gratitude rather than a feeling of lack.

Security and identity

Many of us only have a sense of who we are through what we own and by what we do for a living. Our possessions, relationships and job define us and give us 'identity'. We get the idea of 'Who I am' through the material (*prakṛti*) rather than from who we *really* are. Without certain possessions, we may feel that we are of little value.

However, when we do have a lot of 'things,' then we are either worried about losing

what we have, or we make really complicated stressful lives for ourselves in order to keep it all going. This might mean doing a high-powered but unfulfilling job to pay for a life-style that we then don't really have time to enjoy and which only makes us happy for some of the time. This is a fairly typical scenario for someone who has stress and fatigue. That was certainly my experience – I ended up doing a job that I hated in PR to fund a shallow but status-driven life-style which I didn't have time to appreciate because I was always working to support the image I had of myself as a successful career woman.

How much do I *really* need to be OK?

I know from my travels to India that having one room, a table, a bed and one gas ring can be enough to live with, in terms of contentment. Our idea of 'necessity' for living has got quite out of hand to the point of making our planet sick. Actually, we never can be truly secure whilst we rely on anything externally because of the law of *pariṇāma*. Everything is always changing. I have met people who appeared to have everything as far as material wealth was concerned, but then they lost it all through illness.

Ultimately, it is impossible to be completely secure. In recent years, what with banks and even countries going broke or being invaded, there is nothing in this world that we can completely rely on. The ultimate lesson for us all of course has been the advent of Covid 19. It has taught us that **everything is impermanent** and can be taken away at any time. So, the idea of security is conceptual and relative. **Instead, we need to look for security *inside of ourselves***. If we want to get off the treadmill of always chasing more, then we first need to realise that we will *always* want more and more, because we

are trying to fill a black hole - that barely acknowledged feeling of inadequacy because of *avidyā*. *Nothing will ever be enough*. The questions to ask are: When will enough be enough? Can I be happy with what I have in this moment?

The second motivation: Pleasure (*kāma*)

According to the *puruṣārtha*, the second motivation that we have in life is to find pleasure. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with having some enjoyment. The problem comes if we think that this will make us permanently happy, or if we use the search for pleasure to distract ourselves from the existential problems of *avidyā*. In consumer-based societies, once we feel that we are relatively secure, then we may look to our leisure time to make us happy. Holidays, shopping, sex, entertainment, alcohol and even drugs: there is plenty out there to give us some fun and to stop us from being still. The problem is that the pleasure is short-lived. We take the holiday, buy the car, get drunk or stoned, enjoy a year or two of the relationship then it ends. The happiness goes, and we are left with a slightly empty feeling again, which we try to fill with yet more fun-filled distraction. Then we may get locked into a cycle of continually seeking pleasure in order to numb ourselves from the pain of being mortal: the sorrow of illness, old age and death - or from just being alone with our thoughts and feelings. What follows is an explanation of the psychology of desire and happiness as described by Vedanta.

Desire – Where is the happiness really?

There is an object that you desire. This can be anything from a new car, a new job, a house, a dress, a piece of electronic equipment to a love-relationship. You really crave this object. You fantasise in your mind about how happy you will be once you have whatever it is. Actually, your mind may be quite agitated by this craving and this isn't very pleasant. Your thoughts may become fast so that you can't think clearly. Your discrimination may be completely lost as your desire clouds your thinking. Then, you get what you want, you are happy and you temporarily experience peace - even bliss! This is the peace that comes from the ending of the agitation, although you don't realise it, because you think that the joy is coming from getting what you want. But sooner or later the happiness ends. Why? Because either the object changes (the dress goes out of fashion, the car is dated, the boy/girlfriend is not all you thought that they would be), or your feelings towards the object change and you are no longer satisfied. And so, like a hamster forever on a wheel, you look for the next thing that will give you the happiness-hit again. And until you get it, you feel vaguely incomplete - or even angry and disappointed. To give an example, if we are looking for love from a life-partner, the expectation is that the other person should add something or fix us and make us happy and secure for the future, or provide us with the love that we don't have for ourselves. This however, can lead to a great deal of suffering. If the relationship comes from a feeling of 'lack', or 'I am not good enough and I am lonely on my own,' or: 'I need to care for, or to be looked after by someone,' then the danger is that the relationship will be dysfunctional and if it ends, it can be devastating.

What Yoga says - and this is very important in terms of understanding our true nature - is that the happiness was never in the object in the first place. *The happiness and peace*

*that the object temporarily gave you, comes from inside you and not outside, from the object. If it came from the object, then we would all be chasing similar things, which would have the same positive effects on all of us. But your new iPhone doesn't make me feel happy and my dress doesn't suit you! However, we mistakenly think that the joy is in the object simply because when we get what we want, good feelings temporarily flood the whole system for a short while and the mind quietens. So, we make the error of confusing the things that we chase with this peace of mind. This is a mistake! It's helpful to realise that the feelings of peace and happiness are really inside us *all the time* and never in the object. We may experience this peace at the end of a yoga class, when want for nothing but are just feeling happy and peaceful with everything in the moment. *What we really want is the sense of freedom that we get when the agitation of the desire for the object stops. What we really want is freedom from desire. Then we realise the peace was actually there, inside us all the time!**

So, hooray! Happiness is in you and not in the object

Yoga explains that *happiness, which equates as peace, is our true nature*, but we have forgotten this because we externalise our senses in our chase for more and more stuff in the form of security and pleasure. Consequently, our real authentic nature gets clouded over with desire, fear, attachments and even anger directed towards things that we believe that we need to complete us and to make us feel better. *As we get caught up in this cycle of pursuing external objects, we become more and more stressed and tired, chasing things that we think we must have to make us feel complete; working harder to pay for the pleasure that we think is in objects, then chasing yet more things to*

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make us feel less inadequate. This, sadly describes much of Western society, where capitalism works by creating the need for more and more (referred to as growth) – even if it exploits other people or the planet. Status, security, power and relationships may give us enough of a happiness high for a while, so we continue to believe that this is where peace lies. We fail to see that what we have right now in this moment is enough. We are convinced that ‘things’ offer the solution for a happy life. Even health can be seen, in this context, as a ‘thing’ that we are forever chasing - an ideal to have in the future – and that I can only be happy when this is obtained..

The third motivation: Duty (*dharma*)

Yoga suggests that another motivation in life is the desire to be good and to act in a way that is ‘dutiful’. It’s about living a virtuous life and being of service to others. This is wonderful - if it truly comes from the right place, because to serve the world with genuine compassion is the right way to live. However, this kind of motivation doesn’t work effectively unless we really understand ourselves first.

If we are truly honest, we are often trying to do good because deep down, we feel incomplete. Being virtuous and helping or even rescuing others seems to fix the empty feeling that we have inside. However, real and altruistic acts of love and kindness are unusual. Many of us think, for example, that helping others is our duty and we can get very caught up with this. However, our first duty needs to be to ourselves. (Authentic self-duty, or acting according to our true nature, is known as *svādharmā* in Sanskrit. A lot of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the main spiritual text from India, is about working out what

our duty is to ourselves and how this relates to doing our duty towards others – and then how this fits together. There is more about this in Part Three). In the context of the *puruṣārtha*, this is about **the balance between maintaining healthy boundaries, whilst still remaining open-hearted to the world**. This is a real tight-rope to navigate. My mother’s generation, for example, was brought up to always put other people first. The Dalai Lama seems to say something like this too: that it is vital to cultivate compassion for others. If we are only concerned with our own needs, then we become selfish and self-absorbed. But this kind of narcissism describes something that is very different from the self-respect and self-compassion that we need to cultivate first, as we saw in the previous chapter. Remember, we have to drink before we can pour. Otherwise we may be helping others in ways that may be detrimental to our own wellbeing. So *svādharma* does *not* describe being self-centred or self-obsessed. It’s rather about developing a genuine sense of kindness, acceptance and love for ourselves, so that we really appreciate that we are also worth taking care of – that we have value as much as anyone else. *It’s the cliché of putting on your oxygen mask first if the plane is about to crash so that you are then able to help others.*

In the workshops and retreats Leah and I have taught over the years, the topic of self-care and compassion are always an important part of the teachings. Most participants find it extremely difficult to tend to their own needs effectively, to the point that many are not even aware what this means, until exhaustion strikes. Even after Burnout or years of chronic illness, our students still find it difficult to value themselves on par with others. This, over time, creates a *saṃskāra* of always putting others needs first. This can become a binding identity – of being a helper or a fixer. Leah and I talk a

lot about self-duty to our Yoga students and when we suggest that they need to love themselves first before they can serve other people effectively from the heart, many of them react with real shock and horror. The idea of looking after oneself is abhorrent to many – particularly women - who are natural care-givers and who have been brought up to put the needs of others first all the time, even at the expense of their own wellbeing. Many of our students *don't* like themselves - or they didn't until they discovered Yoga and started working on real self-acceptance. The point is that we can't possibly be of genuine service and take care of other people properly until we have our own needs sorted out. We can only serve the world if we have a calm and peaceful mind that sees clearly through its reactive, conditioned patterns. We need to work on our own inner peace first, before we can then share this with others. Otherwise we risk passing on our internalised anger or resentment, because we are not coming from the heart.

What does it mean to be good?

If you find the idea of loving yourself hard, then consider this. You are part of nature - just like the flowers, the animals and the trees. You are just as worthy of care and respect. But if you always put duty for others before yourself and if you are frequently trying to rescue and fix other people, then you may be giving in the wrong spirit. You may be seen by people to be 'good' - but what if your actions are coming from an unconscious place of resentment, insecurity, anger or ego? Or from your own feeling of lack? Or from an unconscious desire to cultivate an identity around being good? Or even from a need to impress and gain attention? Helping others can be a way of covering up our own issues and avoiding our own pain; or even as a way to get

attention. This is where we need to be very honest with ourselves as we do our inquiry. If doing your duty (*dharma*) is not sincerely from the heart, in the end, you risk actually passing on more suffering. We have seen that people-pleasing, to the detriment of our own health and welfare, is very ingrained in our culture. It is certainly how I was brought up - that I should always put others first and that I wasn't important. However, when we give to others without considering our own needs, we literally give away our energy. So, it's really helpful to see our energy as a precious commodity and not as something that should be used without some discrimination.

When we love and accept ourselves sincerely, then we *can* do our duty and serve society for the right reasons. We don't risk exhausting ourselves by doing too much. *Service should always come from the heart - the place of authentic love, peace and clarity.* This is vitally important for the Yoga therapist (or any therapist) who should be giving from a place of inner-peace and health, rather than from a place of needing to rescue and fix.

What we really seek: The fourth motivation - Freedom (*mokṣa*)

Most of us are motivated in life to create security, chase happiness or to be seen to do our duty. But when we really think about this, we may see that we are actually moved by a deeper, more authentic desire. This is the desire to be free, which Yoga says is our fourth and true motivation in life. Happiness, as taught by Yoga, is freedom from dependence on anything, freedom from want and fear and freedom from the need to be something other than what we already are, right here, right now. This sense of freedom

is only possible however, when we have cultivated self-compassion and acceptance of both ourselves and of our circumstances in every moment and are fully conscious of our *vāsanās* and *saṃskāras*. We are then in a position to respond more mindfully to events as they happen. Then we have a friendly attitude towards life in whatever form it manifests - even when times are challenging. We are not seeking to mend, heal, avoid, chase or change anything. When we are free, we feel solid and calm and truly *know* that there is nothing outside ourselves that we need to seek, because nothing could possibly make us feel any more peaceful than we already are. We know that we are OK whatever happens. From this understanding, our desires and fears fade away. We take pleasure in our own authentic nature instead of seeking happiness through objects or a continual round of 'doings'. This freedom comes about through understanding and discriminating between what is real and what changes. A reminder: what changes is everything that we perceive in the world, including our thoughts and feelings. What doesn't change is the internal, eternal sense of 'I'. Understanding this freedom is sometimes described as 'Liberation'. To truly realise this, we may have to step away from the conditioning of our culture and follow our heart, rather than go with what convention dictates.

When we practice Yoga, we often have a glimpse of what freedom means. Towards the end of the class as the mind quietens, we begin to savour our own authentic nature - which is peace. *This peace doesn't require anything to be added to it.* The mind has become still and our worries and cares no longer matter - we are able to just 'Be'.

Happiness and peace are your true nature

It is quite logical to understand that a definition of happiness is to be accepting and peaceful of whatever arises in each moment, and to not want any more than we have right now. Yet most of us resist this by fighting how things are and by arguing with reality. We do this because of *avidyā*. As we have seen, this subtle feeling of ‘I am separate and something is missing’ encourages us to seek happiness and wholeness in the wrong direction – the result of which is very often stress, exhaustion and unhappiness. Behaving like this however, is encouraged by modern society. We are driven to be ambitious or to compete with others, which further exhausts us and compounds the feeling of inadequacy. If you have students who are ill and are therefore unable to participate in this busy style of living at the moment, they are probably longing to get back to being like this as soon as possible, because it is deemed normal and it’s what everyone else is doing.

There is a way out, however. Polishing the cloudy glass of the mind and using the Yoga techniques in Parts Three and Four of this book will help both the teacher and student to understand, appreciate and experience freedom. This is the knowledge that our true eternal being is whole and complete, whatever happens. Nothing more needs to be added or done.

A meditation on love

Below is an exercise in love, which I have used a lot since my dog died and it has helped me to deal with the grief. I feel into the love I have for her and the love that she gave to me. I realise from this practice that the love always has been there and always will be – even though I can’t physically be with her anymore.

*Sit or lie down comfortably and close your eyes. Take a few minutes to settle. Relax as much as you can. Focus on your breath and on each inhalation visualise gently breathing in kindness. Take your hands to your heart-centre and let your awareness drop there. Visualise kindness coming right into your heart-centre on each in-breath, as if you are breathing in and out through your heart. Take a few breaths like this. Now think about someone or something that you love – what you love most in the world. This may be a person, an animal or a piece of music, or a location that touches your heart. Imagine and feel your love being directed outward from your heart toward your love object on your out-breath. Bring in the qualities of compassion and gratitude for your loved one. (Pause for up to ten breaths). Next, turn this feeling around and visualise this love and compassion being directed back inwards towards yourself. See that the love is always there and coming from you and not from anything external. Really feel, imagine and sense this love. Send this love to every cell of your body on both the inhalation and the exhalation. As you bathe in love, understand that **you are this love** – it is not something that comes from outside. You are whole and complete. You are worthy of love as you are part of all of creation. Feel love flowing from the palms of the hands, into your heart. When you are ready, open your eyes and carry on with your day, knowing that you are supported.*

The Yoga Tool Box so far - a summary

As Yogis, it is helpful to be conscious of our thoughts and feelings and to keep vigilant about how we are living the teachings of Yoga - not in a judgemental way, but in a curious, compassionate way. If our first Yoga tool is awareness, then the second tool is inquiry – to look deeply into our motivations in life and to understand that it is more helpful to look for peace within rather than to seek it externally.

Key points:

- *Avidyā* motivates us to look for happiness in external objects and situations via the pursuit of security, pleasure and duty. But these pursuits may drain us and make us stressed and tired as we chase more and more.
- Happiness equates to peace and is our true nature. Happiness is in us and not in objects. There is nothing wrong with objects, but our constant pursuit, attachment or identification to them may cause us to suffer.
- What we are really seeking is freedom from desire and fear - and freedom from our dependence on objects.
- To encourage self-compassion, it's helpful to understand that we are loveable and not separate from life and that we don't need anything more to complete us.