

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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EXPLORE & ENLIGHTEN

YOGA'S FAILURE & SUCCESS FACTORS

The DOSHA BALANCE

Advaita yoga

JUDITH HANSON LASATER
YOGA OF SPEECH

REMEDIAL YOGA



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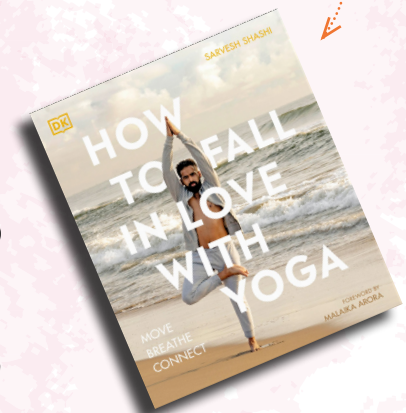
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GRIEF & LOSS

DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL BODY

How to meet difficult emotions without falling apart

Words: Judy Hirsh Sampath, Yoga Therapist and CPD facilitator for the BWY





Have you seen that cartoon of the monk seated in meditation with the caption: “Come on bliss, hurry up, I haven’t got all day!”

This is so relatable given most of us are looking for a fast track to inner peace when we feel out of control of our bodies, minds and emotions and life can be overwhelming. However, meditation can take practice and is often misunderstood. Even after years of meditation, I have days when even closing my eyes feels like an impossible task, especially when grief is close to the surface.

What I’ve come to realise is that rather than pushing emotions away in the hope we won’t have to feel them, we can learn to allow them to surface, to acknowledge them as part of life, lean into the discomfort and even give them space to breathe. Even with the visceral feelings of grief and loss, embracing our vulnerability is often the first step towards healing. It takes readiness and courage, and often it comes in the form of a ‘wake-up call’, a life event we cannot ignore.

BEING WITH THE TRUTH OF ‘WHAT IS’

Grief doesn’t only stem from the loss of a loved one. There are many forms of

loss – loss of a lifestyle, losing a career or retiring, children leaving home, and the demise of our planet. On a more personal level, as we age, our bodies change and we experience the loss of youth, the loss of collagen, and the ability to perform yoga postures the way we used to. In these moments, we may find ourselves grieving for our former selves, questioning who we are and where we are going.

As so much of our conditioning is tied to our physical appearance, we gradually awaken to the fact that we are more than our body, and it is important to connect with and befriend the *koshic* layers beyond the physical. As we confront our own mortality, we are drawn to revisit and remember all we have forgotten in our busy lives. Dealing with raw grief is a pivotal moment in our lives. It can be unbearable, the depth of the pain unspeakably shocking.

As a yoga therapist using my own grief for self-study, I have explored how to allow grief and loss to move through my body and mind. I know

that blocking it, pushing it down, avoiding it can offer initial respite, but we will not fall apart if we allow ourselves to feel it. As we drop through the layers of being, a space opens up that connects us back into life, like a seedling growing through a crack in the pavement. The key is

"GRIEF DOESN'T ONLY STEM FROM THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE. THERE ARE MANY FORMS OF LOSS – LOSS OF A LIFESTYLE, LOSING A CAREER OR RETIRING, CHILDREN LEAVING HOME, AND THE DEMISE OF OUR PLANET."

to hold your attention steady on what's true, to learn to stay with the discomfort with tenderness and self-compassion. It takes a brave heart and an unapologetic attitude to meet unwanted or what may be seen as 'weak' emotion, to cry when it comes when we've been told 'don't cry'. If you let grief come through you and give yourself as much time as you need, it will lose its intensity. Sounds simple. Easier said than done, right? So how can we do this?

GIVING UP THE FIGHT

Firstly you do not have to do this alone. When immersing yourself in the narrative of your situation, it's easy to think you're alone. You are not. Without trying to suppress our emotions, we can allow the drama to unfold, we can find a clear understanding of what we are experiencing, be it a melodrama, horror, comedy, or tearjerker. We might discover dark humour or a film score. Eventually, tired of the exaggerated melodrama, we seek a new genre, a different narrative, sparking a shift. This



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fresh perspective can be transformative. By choosing acceptance over resistance, we can find a renewed sense of hope, a catalogue of moments that remind us of the precious moments more than the loss.

While these emotions may resurface, we can trust in our inner resilience to navigate them. After all, nothing in life remains static – change is inevitable, and with it, the promise of renewal.

PRACTICES TO HELP RIDE THE WAVES OF LOSS AND GRIEF

Here are some practices I've found helpful for navigating the choppy waters of loss and grief. Give them a try and see what resonates with you. Feel free to repeat any that feel particularly useful, and don't hesitate to get creative and make up your own!

PRACTICE ONE

This first step focuses on the physical level, grounding you in your body and senses. It's a reminder to appreciate the miraculous container that is your body, its extraordinary ability to hold steady, to breathe at will, its incredible capacity to repair and heal and most of all, to override fear with love. Set an alarm for 30 minutes.

- Find a comfortable seat or lie down
- Lean back and down, anchor into the ground with long sighs out
- Open your eyes wide, close them tight, then relax the muscles around the eyes
- Wink one eye open, then the other – notice change in perspective
- Pull silly faces to stretch your jaw, tongue, facial muscles - express all kinds of moods and make some sounds, notice what arises in your private space

- Go between eyes open and eyes closed, and then relax the muscles as much as you can, stay with eyes closed unless it's too much right now
- Acknowledge what you are feeling now and let it be just as it is
- Lengthen your inhale slowly into the spaces in your skull, your brain, your body
- Soften your neck, shoulders, belly, and hips with each exhale
- Cover your ears and hold your head in your hands
- Massage your ears and face tenderly
- Get quiet so you can sense sounds
- Slow down and notice what's happening within you, moment by moment
- Track what is true in each moment, thoughts are allowed too!
- Let go of any practice and simply be present
- When the timer goes off, reflect on what you've discovered and any changes you've noticed.

PRACTICE TWO

Staying intensely present can shift your focus from doing to receiving, from the physical to the soulful. When you shed your physical body and die to yourself psychologically, you connect with something infinitely vast.

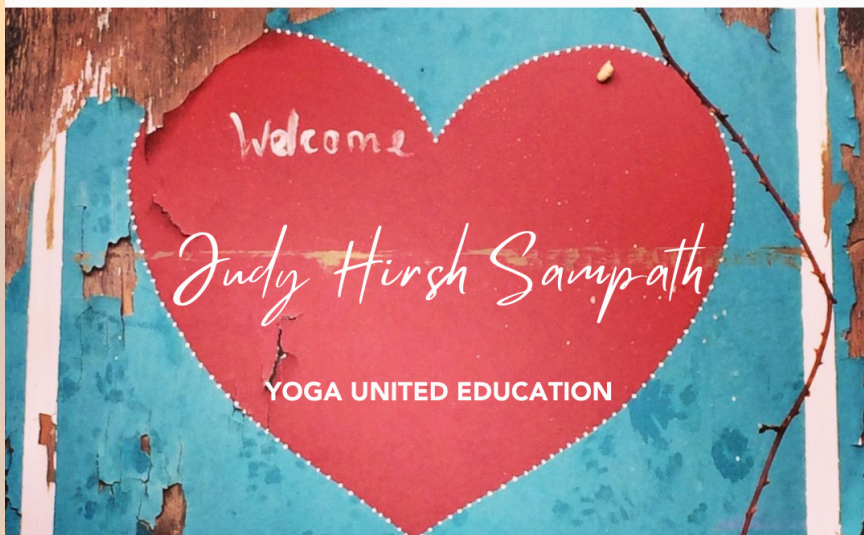
There are further steps to explore on this journey tapping into the deep well of resources offered by yoga and meditation practices. These practices are intertwined with the cycles of life and death, offering wisdom on how to navigate them with grace. This will be explored more deeply in workshops where the facilitator can hold space for you.

In the meantime, consider holding space for yourself. It's something you probably already do without naming what you're doing. Talk to yourself, hum a tune, stamp your feet, shout to release pent-up emotion.

YOGA THERAPY FOR GRIEF & LOSS



Sacred Recovery for yoga practitioners, teachers, therapists & circle facilitators



Here's a suggested approach to begin. You can do this practice standing and then move to seated meditation, and finally easing into floor-based relaxation to allow yourself to deeply rest towards the end.

- Standing up, take some deliberately full inhales and sound the exhale like a sigh of relief, a blowout, cry out, or yawn
- Clench and unclench your fists or use your body to express the release of pent-up energy along with the sound and do this for 3-5 minutes
- Take a comfortable seat
- Relax or close your eyes and focus back into the optic nerves so your brain gets the message that you're safe, you're not in danger
- Inhale through your nostrils and hum to yourself as you breathe out – you can stay with the same note and make the sound like that of a bee (humming bee or *Brahmari* breath) or hum a tune.
- Focus on the vibrations and the sound as you continue to exhale. Do this for 2-5 minutes
- Once complete, get quiet and notice a soundless easy breath, let your breath breathe you.
- Offer space for imaginary being or beings to show up and be with you – a friend, a guard, an ally, ancestor or a guide to show up and join you here to see and hear you, help and support you. Welcome them here, arrange them around you however you want
- You can remain seated or lie down
- Repeat some affirmations eg. “we are here”, “I am safe”, “I have time”, “I am breathing”, “I am at home here”, “it's OK to feel like this”, “it won't always be like this”, “I feel you here with me”... You can talk out loud or repeat mentally with your breath.
- After 5-7 minutes, give yourself a stretch as if you're waking up from a dreamy sleep and make some notes on what happened and how you're feeling now.

CONCLUSION

When you need comfort, turning to the ancient practice of meditation can support you, and as above, you can do it your way, play with whatever keeps your attention here, and observe what changes over time. Remind yourself that you are part of something much larger than yourself, bound by the cycles of life and death. Honour your longing, distress, and feelings of brokenness, and despair, knowing that you are never alone in this vast field of existence. Others are feeling this too, it's a natural part of being.

Allow yourself to fully feel all the emotions, knowing that they will inevitably lead you back toward love, generosity, and healing. If you're feeling down, try naming your emotions, fully experiencing them, and contemplating their opposites as a pathway toward growth and transformation. And think of someone who may be suffering a similar emotion and give them a call.

Judy will be offering and sharing practices on her BWY CPD days on Yoga Therapy for Grief and Loss on 21 April in Kent (<https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/263>) and 18 May in Wirral, Merseyside (<https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/262>).



Judy Hirsh Sampath is a yoga teacher and yoga therapist, founder of Yoga United (YU) and course director of the YU Education accredited yoga therapy diploma. She offers many CPD days with the BWY to support personal enrichment, as well as developing skills and inspiration for yoga teachers.
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