



## Yoga for deep rest and healing

**Guest: Gail Aylward**

*Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.*

**Anna Duschinsky - [00:00:15]**

So welcome, everybody, to this interview with Gail Aylward, thank you for being with us today.

**Gail Aylward**

My pleasure.

**Anna Duschinsky**

We are going to talk today about yoga and meditation for recovery, for calming, and for creating a real healing state.

Gail has been a yoga teacher for many years, a student of the diamond approach since 2005. And I believe, Gail, you went on your first meditation retreat in 1994 and have pretty much been continuously doing meditation or leading meditation retreats with your husband, Martin Aylward, pretty much since then, is that right?

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah. So way back in 1994, I sat my first, it was a 10 day silent retreat in India, and I was with my, we were with our seven month old baby. And it was quite an experience to, you know, I didn't stay in the monastery, it was outside the monastery. But I would cycle in each morning at five o'clock in the morning to attend the sitting so...

**Anna Duschinsky**

With a seven month old, that's committed!

**Gail Aylward**

With a seven month old, and then Martin would bring our daughter in, I was still breastfeeding, so that I could still breastfeed her at lunch time.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Amazing. And since then, obviously, you've gone on to found the Moulin de Chaves meditation center in the south of France as well, which I know Alex always is talking to me about, and raving about. So, you're very well qualified to talk to us here today, obviously, about this topic.

Could you tell us a little bit about your own experience of, and journey with yoga and meditation, and what drew you to that and what your experience has been through that?

### **Gail Aylward - [00:01:58]**

Sure, Anna. So I started my first, I attended my first yoga course in 1991 or 1992 in London, which is where I'm from. And you can imagine, back then there were not many yoga courses available. It was quite new. And I was pregnant with my first child and I'd heard that yoga was good for the back. So that's actually what drew me to my first yoga course, was hearing that it was good for pregnancy. So after doing a bit of research, I finally found a place in South London, in Blackheath.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

So amazing to think, isn't it, that in 1991, this was something that was hard to find, given how prevalent, how much of a part of just everyday culture... I think the same about meditation as well, I remember when I started meditating when I was 18 years old, and I'm now 42. That was weird, you know, there weren't meditation teacher, there were no apps, there was nothing. All of that has has really just escalated so much. It's always hard to imagine, isn't it, what it what it was like at that point.

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah I totally agree. It was sort of seen as being a bit weird what we were doing. Practicing meditation. We lived in the south-west of France for ten years before coming to the Dordogne. And in very simple life, and we already started a very simple, I would never call it center, but it was a place where people could come and meditate. And that was in 1994. So things have just escalated, more recently I would say.

But you know, we were looked upon as being those sort of weird Buddhists up the hill, where we used to live.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

I love it, the weird Buddhists up the hill, I like that phrase. And so for you, from that early experience of yoga, just as you say, for pregnancy and for your back, what happened? What's your journey been since then?

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah, something resonated with me, when I started to practice. It's like maybe on a cellular level, maybe on ancestry level, who knows? Something resonated and it's like, oh, this feels so good.

And so, like I said, after giving birth, I actually went to India to give birth to my daughter and came back and then went back again, did my first retreat in Bodh Gaya. And then we settled in Europe, in the foothills of the Pyrenees for ten years.

There wasn't much choice. There was even less choice than there had been in London. But somehow I picked up some aspects of yoga, the asanas part of yoga, and was practicing them, and some friends would pass by who also were really into yoga practice. And it's like, the body was like, yes, this felt so good somehow. And I could see the ways that it affected me, in terms of just becoming more conscious to myself, to my body.

You know, before I used to sort of walk with a little bit of a hunch, and then all of a sudden it's like, oh, straightening up. And I think it was the breathing. It was the deep breathing that made a big difference.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Right. So the breath, and what you're talking about there I think is really important. If we bring it back to what we're talking about in the conference this week, about Chronic Fatigue, about fatigue, about the role of stress. And I always think, to get to a point, and I've been there myself, to get to a point of Chronic Fatigue, there's a real disconnect, right? There's a real disconnect between us and our bodies and our emotions.

So I love what you're saying there in the sense of it, there was something in it that brought you back, that made you more conscious of your body.

### **Gail Aylward - [00:05:52]**

Yeah, totally. And, you know, I was busy having babies, running a very simple center, so that connect that you spoke about was there, and then it would go again. So it was an ongoing practice. Because at some point it's like, oh, there's tiredness here. But I think it took me a while to recognize that, or to allow myself to have the tiredness. Because, you know, there was something else saying, oh, I shouldn't be tired, I should be doing something else. On a mind level.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

So that override, which is such a part of, I guess, how we're living. And it sounds like, for you, and interesting what you're saying there as well, because...

I think for some people, they think, well, you know, OK, I've paid attention, I've meditated and now I've tuned in. But as you say, it's so easy, because it's become so habitual, hasn't it, to slip out of that again, to override in all of the ways that we've learned to.

So other than, I guess, practice, what kind of brought you more and more to that awareness of breath and body?

### **Gail Aylward**

I think... I was going to say practice!

So definitely practice, ongoing practice. And definitely meditation practice, because for me, meditation really was like the foundation of my spiritual path, if you like. And it really highlighted, it shone awareness on areas that I was quite blind to before.

And I could see that stuff started to rise on many different levels. And at one point I was like, oh my God, what am I going to do with this? I don't know how to hold this, but there was stuff arising from the meditation practice. And then from there on, then I went on to practice the Diamond Approach and other practices that really supported me in understanding more.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

OK, so really interesting, so the meditation. And we'll talk in a moment about, what are the links between meditation and yoga and how this all fits together, I guess.

But for you, both, the yoga sounds like it was quite a physical awakening and reconnecting physically and into the breath, into the body and the meditation really supported that awareness, by the sounds of it. Is that right?

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah, definitely. So, you know, yoga is seen as basically quite physical, in the West. I think you'll agree with me. Most people go to yoga class to stretch the body, maybe tone up the body, etc.

Yet it's more than that. You know, it's a whole philosophy, it's a whole path, it's a whole school. So even though I followed the meditation, it was coming from a Buddhist angle, yet I took on the Asanas, and the Pranayama, the breath control from the yogic path and kind of married the two.

And for me, that felt so important, to have the mindful movement in relationship with the formal sit and practice.

### **Anna Duschinsky - [00:09:07]**

OK, and what is it that feels so important to you about that, that duality, about bringing that in and combining it?

### **Gail Aylward**

Because there's a lot, in meditation retreats, especially 10 days, there's a lot of sitting. Fine, we can manage that. Yet the body is intrinsically linked to our practice. And there's something about the awakening that can happen with ongoing deepening practice, that needs to happen in the body.

So we need to be more embodied in ourselves. And often, there can be a sense of, whatever one wants to call it, but it can really be some kind of head center, it can be out there. And for me, and I realized that for myself, it had to really come in, and down.

So you're sensing in the body, and you're being in contact with the body in such a different way. Whereas we're so used to, very habituated to being cut off from here. And it's all about the mind, it's all about the thoughts, and all the energy goes up.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

So I guess it's that, as you say, it's recognising it's the physical practice as well as the sitting practice, the meditation, the mind-based practice. Because, of course, meditation can mean lots of different things, can't it? And so many different forms and schools. But for most people, as you say, it's about closing the eyes, focusing, sitting practice. Totally with you.

I remember, I'd been practising meditation, and I thought I was getting, you know, I thought I was really... I was having great experiences. And I remember working with a body-work practitioner. It was still in my recovery journey. He went, Anna you do realise the aim is to come in, the aim is to bringing in here, not escape out, right.

### **Gail Aylward**

Exactly. And you said a really good word there, Anna. Escape. Because I think that's what many of us do. We escape out there.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

So I guess what I'm getting from you is the importance of a meditation practice. And we'll talk about why in a moment and how that... Calming the nervous system and all these things, but a meditation practice, that combined with the kind of physical practice that brings you more into an awareness of your body, so that it isn't just about, here and up. It becomes about here and connecting in, right.

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah. It really feels like it's a journey of intimacy. So it's really about coming back and coming back home to this location, to this temple, actually, that so many of us have, you know, we can really sort of berate ourselves, not being good enough, it should look like this. It's the wrong shape. It's the wrong color. It's the wrong whatever.

So, you know, to really embody and it's that practice of care. Careful. Care and kindful attention as well, as we practice in a more embodied way.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Kindful attention and careful attention. I love that. So, yes, my experience of my journey with Chronic Fatigue and everyone I've worked with over the last 20 years, is that disconnect. Absolutely. That, we are not embodying ourselves, we are not connecting. Or that's a difficult place to be, or it's an uncomfortable place to be, or it's a place that we judge. So for you, in that journey, and as you've

worked with others as well, what do we need to know?

Because I think for some people, it can be quite scary, really, can't it, to kind of imagine coming in more?

**Gail Aylward - [00:12:42]**

Yeah. For me, there's something about acceptance. That whatever is here is allowed. It doesn't matter what it looks like, what it feels like, it's about giving space to whatever is here. And it takes practice and it takes guidance and going on retreats, feeling the support of the teacher and the Sangha around can be really beneficial. Meeting someone, a guide or a teacher, one to one, can really help in that practice as well.

But, yeah, it's definitely, it takes an inner strength and courage to take those first steps. And looking back on my own practice, I am so happy that I did, even if at times I felt like I'd rather be anywhere else but here, because you know, what I put a lid on for all those years, and was then materializing, was it was it was intense. It could be painful. It could be strong emotions. Yet there was something about staying with that that felt very freeing.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Right. Because if we can stay with it, then we're no longer putting the lid on, we're no longer running away, we're no longer avoiding it, right.

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah. And just turning towards and accepting and facing it, whatever that thing is.

**Anna Duschinsky**

OK, and so when we're talking about this in the context of, perhaps a lot of people watching this, either with clients who are dealing with fatigue issues, or if they themselves are dealing with fatigue issues. I think for some people, the view of yoga particularly, is that it's maybe quite high energy and that might be a bit much. So can you speak to that?

How do we engage with yoga specifically - then we can talk about meditation as well, of course - in a way that's supportive? And how can yoga support that building awareness, which we've talked about, and our kind of nervous system calming and resetting and moving into more of a healing state?

**Gail Aylward**

Firstly, I think it's really important that people do some research to find, like, for instance, a yoga class that suits their particular needs. Because as you said, it can have that kind of high energy feel to it, for some of the classes. And that's great. And that suits some people. Yet I know for myself, I was naturally attracted to what was called, à l'époque, back then, Viniyoga. And that was really a very kind of gentle, soft yoga. And really the emphasis on the breath, really staying with the breath. And with the idea that in the past, it would be one teacher to one student, which I really enjoyed that and felt that again resonated with me.

So there's something about doing the research to find out what yoga would best suit you. And be free to attend classes that then you realize that's not for me, I'll check out some others. And there is such a wealth out there, especially because of the pandemic. Everything on Zoom. There is so much available, that perhaps living in somewhere quite remote, one wouldn't be able to access.

And then, take that step, take that journey. See whether, for me, I say as long as someone can breathe, you can practice yoga. Because it's really about the breath.

Often I get people coming on retreat and saying, Oh, I can't touch my toes. And it's like, you don't have to touch your toes. Yoga is really about being where you are, as you are, at this moment. And then just working from there and practicing from that place.

**Anna Duschinsky - [00:16:26]**

Ok, so seeking out some support, seeking out a class or a teacher or something that will support you in that practice for starters. Finding an approach, as you said, I think yin yoga, essentially, right.

I was speaking about Viniyoga which was a type of yoga, by T. K. V. Desikachar from before, which he then just named yoga.

**Gail Aylward**

And it had a very, it had a more gentle approach, to some of the other yogas that were out there. And it suited me.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Yes. So finding a yoga, a kind of yoga and practice that is appropriate for you at whatever point you're at, in terms of fatigue. But I like what you're saying there that if you can breathe, you can practice yoga. That at the basic level, you can begin to kind of move in those gentle ways, or simply to breathe in those ways.

What are the benefits? If you can begin with that kind of practice.

**Gail Aylward**

Well, and what I should have added also, within the yoga class, there's a lot of, you just talked about it, yin yoga classes, which is a more relaxation class. There's also restorative yoga, which is more the line that I've gone down as well. So as well as practicing gentle hatha yoga, then I also have learned and studied and offer restorative yoga.

And it's really about calming the nervous system down. You know, there's something in us that gets quite stressed, whether it's the mind, whether there's stress in the body, it can be felt and it activates the sympathetic nervous system, which I'm sure we're learning a lot about during these days.

**Anna Duschinsky**

A lot about that, yeah.

**Gail Aylward**

So when we practice, specifically restorative yoga, we're trying to de-activate the sympathetic nervous system. And because there's 8 activating systems in the sympathetic nervous system, it's more difficult to slow down. So when you practice restorative yoga, I've got a list here, you know, there's certain things like physical comfort, there's the postures are all held with blankets and bolsters. You shut the light out, all things that could stimulate. Because basically you're reversing the process and you're trying to activate more the parasympathetic nervous system.

And so things like darkness, making sure that you're warm. And also being given permission, because often people feel like they're not allowed to relax. As I said, it can often be this mind story, that we've inherited maybe from our history, that says you should be like... which can often feed into that place of not being able to fully relax.

**Anna Duschinsky - [00:19:31]**

OK. So the darkness, particularly from restorative yoga, which sounds perfect for anyone working with Chronic Fatigue, right.

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Anna Duschinsky**

As a start point. Darkness, the comfort, the support, as you say, the postures are supported, there's a lot of, really working towards allowing the body to relax and move into far more of that healing space.

**Gail Aylward**

Exactly.

**Anna Duschinsky**

By, as you say, removing all the kind of stressors, if you like, and stimulation that sits around. And so, by practicing in that way, I suppose you're shifting, even if just for that time frame that you're there, you're shifting the body into that more healing state.

And I'm guessing over time, if you're practicing that, even weekly, but ideally every day or every few days, what kind of shifts are you seeing in yourself or in the clients that you're working with?

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah, so I actually teach a retreat called Rest, Relax and Renew, here at the Moulin. So, like I said, I feel very passionate about this. And as well as, what we talked about, setting up the postures, really allowing people just to luxuriate in each posture, making sure everyone's covered, everyone's warm. And something starts to slow down.

It's like, because the sympathetic nervous system gets very activated in this domino system, it takes a while to revert back. So that's why a regular practice is useful in terms of really starting to slow down on that, and then allowing the parasympathetic nervous system to activate.

And also the breath, bringing in pranayama, for instance, alternate nostril breathing. And it can start very simply, just by visualizing the inhalation, visualizing the exhalation and with emphasis on the exhalation. Because it's on the exhalation that that also touches into the vagus nerve. I'm sure we've heard about this as well! And that can really help promote that sense of deep rest and calming of the nervous system.

**Anna Duschinsky**

One of the things that strikes me is, there's something about that space and that state that you create, through doing something like that restorative kind of class, that first off stays with you and if you do it regularly, obviously, it kind of builds that. What I think I see in clients a lot is, they don't really know what healing state means.

Not what it looks like or feels like, because, of course, we've become so conditioned not to be there. So it becomes almost conceptual. Yep, I've got to be more in healing state. But actually, what is that? And I think what's lovely about what you're talking about, is that you create the experience, the felt sense of this. This is what we're moving to, right.

And over time, that begins to give you kind of like an anchor point of what you're coming back to. And I think, giving people an experience of the ultimate, what's the alternative to being wired and in your head and in that disconnected space. And actually that needs to be a very tangible felt experience, I

think.

**Gail Aylward - [00:22:58] .**

Yeah, exactly. It has to be very experiential. And with the meditation as a solid foundation. So for me, again, they go hand in hand. It doesn't feel like it's two different paths at all.

I might be listening to the Buddha sutras rather than...

**Anna Duschinsky**

Rather than the yogic...

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah. But it's really bringing it together. And for me, it's been so beneficial and I really felt the effects over the time that I've been doing it, over the years, just in terms of well-being, in terms of just being more at ease in my body and in myself, generally.

And so I think having the poses, like if someone comes back from work, they're stressed, they're overwhelmed, it's like, take 20 minutes. Just go into the classic Shavasana with the props, you know, with the little bag for the eyes that puts pressure there, that again promotes that sense of relaxation.

That then slowly, like you said, over time, these benefits can be felt.

**Anna Duschinsky**

And I'm guessing also, as you say, if someone's in quite high stress, it can be quite difficult to move from that to a kind of meditative state, right.

**Gail Aylward**

Totally.

**Anna Duschinsky**

To go into meditation. In fact, if I'm not wrong, and I could be, I understand that the asanas were a way of preparing the meditation, right?

**Gail Aylward**

Exactly. Yeah.

**Anna Duschinsky**

There's something beautiful in that link as well, that if you are in quite high stress, it might be difficult to just sit, because what you're aware of is your thoughts going crazy. But perhaps through those postures, in that kind of restorative way that you're talking about, the whole system begins to calm. And then maybe, there could be more space to move to kind of meditation, or that becomes your way in, I guess, perhaps.

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah, definitely, Anna. It can be either with the restorative yoga, or what I call the mindful movement, which is gentle, hatha yoga. So it's not really, anyone can do it and there's always different poses that people can go in if they're not able to go into, you know, they can sit on a chair and do poses.



So just that gentle movement, stretching of the body, inhaling deeply, exhaling deeply, stretching with kindness and awareness, really helps to support the meditation.

And when I teach, I've been teaching, with my husband, a yoga retreat here for maybe, it's yoga and meditation, for maybe 12 years now. And every time I teach the yoga side, the asana side, and then we move into meditation, you know, the stillness in the hall is very, very... You can really sense the stillness, because people have moved beforehand. And like you said, if there is people who have got lots of energy and there's lots of activity in the mind, that's a really useful tool to have, to move the body.

But the difference, that stops it from being just doing athletics, and of course there's nothing wrong with that, is that we're turning the attention inwards when we move. So you're moving with awareness, with gentleness and coming back to the breath, using the breath as the anchor. So we're not up in our heads all the time, and when we are, no problem, come back down.

So you're using the breath, you're using the stretches, the poses. What Iyengar called meditation in movement, is the yoga.

### **Anna Duschinsky - [00:26:43]**

So there's that particular level of awareness, that we might not, in a positive way, I guess, to our breath, to that focus. Again, I think for a lot of people, if they've got fatigue issues, moving, even walking can be actually quite challenging.

### **Gail Aylward**

Sure. Sure.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

It can be quite anxiety provoking. So, again, it strikes me that that awareness of, OK, how am I breathing and now where am I moving, kind of can supplant some of that anxiety that might be, can I walk this far? Can I do this? Is this going to be ok? Am I going to crash afterwards?

Bringing it into that awareness is a more positive way of using our consciousness in that way, right?

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah, totally. And also being aware of the limitations. So if, like you say, the energy is low, it's like, oh, I can't do this. This class is not me, but maybe the restorative one is the best one for me, at this moment in my life. For instance. So, you know, just making more wise choices, maybe about the diet, oh, I realize, as much as I love this, this isn't very good for me. I can see that it's not good for my digestion.

And there's something about when you take on yoga, whether that's the yogic path, the Buddhist path, the whole thing, or the two together. There naturally arises more, you know, wise choices. We're just more able to realize, this is much better for me than just going with the old familiar habit patterns, that maybe have been unhelpful for us in the past.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Which brings us back to a simple question, I guess, but what is, and I know that you come from a Buddhist tradition with the meditation, but what is yoga to you? How would you define that? Because, again, a lot of people have different views, different expectations around that. But I guess what I'm hearing in what you're saying is, there is a frame of bringing, of entering into, engaging with yoga, which is more than just some ways of moving.

### **Gail Aylward - [00:28:49]**

Yeah. So as I said, yoga, Patanjali, an Indian saint who discovered it maybe two thousand, over two thousand years ago. And with the ancient scripts of India, the Vedas, he then systemized the Yoga Sutra. So if you read that, there's a lot of information on right ways to live in the world, even though it's thousands of years old, you know, just right conduct, how we are in the world, being kind to each other, not stealing, right speech, just a moral, ethical way of being.

And then also, for ourselves, just disciplines that we can take on that we see are useful. So this is, this all comes out, and after that there's the Asana, there's the Pranayama, and then it goes into the more meditative states. And so there's a whole path here that's mapped out, that people, maybe they get their first taste by practicing Asana and then maybe that opens them up to something bigger.

It's like it's a philosophy and a science of ways to be in the world. And it's quite nice that it's not a religion because, you know, some people have aversion to religion. So I like the fact that it's a philosophy. And the last one is samadhi. It's, in there is meditation and it goes down to samadhi. So that's what they call the Ashtanga eight limbs of yoga.

And this is where, I feel that even though I might be following Buddhist meditation, it doesn't matter, because in the whole context, it's the same thing.

And the Diamond Approach is another leg. I've got this vision of this triangle stool, there's the yogic path, the Buddhist path, and diamond approach path. And for me, that's a very yogic path.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Really interesting. And interesting as well that you're combining, you're bringing different elements in, in a way that works for you, that it doesn't have to be prescriptive.

### **Gail Aylward**

Exactly.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

But that people can engage and take what they need from it, perhaps.

### **Gail Aylward**

Exactly. Exactly. You know, some people have practiced yoga, the asanas, and then they find themselves giving up meat, for instance, becoming vegetarian. And not because they were told to, but maybe something in the movements, in the practice, in the relaxation, in the meditation, just opened them up to, oh, what feels better for them? What feels more in touch for them?

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Right. And of course, everyone's different. So what's going to work for one person, what kind of body movement, what kind of lifestyle is going to support our health and our development is going to be very individual. So, again, nice that you can pull the aspects of it and combine it in what works for you and with what works for you, which is very lovely as well.

So, for people who are kind of watching this and going, OK, so where do I begin with all of this?

For starters, I think you've already said some of it, which is find the right place, find the right class, find the right person, teacher, whatever it is. And it sounds like, I mean, talking to an audience where fatigue is an issue, kind of restorative, gentle hatha, yin kind of approaches might fit pretty well for those who are starting out. But then what recommendations, from your own experience and from teaching, how do people begin this?

**Gail Aylward - [00:32:24]**

And within that, I think you can even get classes that are really geared to people suffering from Chronic Fatigue. So it's really checking in and it takes the effort to take that first step. I mean, again, our mind can be so involved, oh this isn't going to be good for me. I need to touch my toes. I already need to be able to do something, to attend this class.

**Anna Duschinsky**

So that's really interesting, recognizing the patterns that we are running about it, right. That we have sometimes patterns or belief systems that we will run, about beginning yoga. Oh, I don't know if I can do it, maybe it's good for them, but I don't know if I can. Perhaps, is it going to be too much? I can't touch my toes. I'm not flexible enough. So, recognizing perhaps a lot of the stories that we're telling ourselves around even beginning, right.

**Gail Aylward**

Exactly. And then seeing from there whether we can make that first move. And it takes, like I said, these things, to go onto this path, it takes a certain amount of courage or inner strength, and just seeing whether we, you know, rather than trying to work it out in the mind, just really checking in with the body. Because the body knows, it's got its own intelligence. And just seeing whether that energy could make us take that first step.

And if you get disappointed, don't stop there. Try another one. That's really the invitation. Because there is so much out there, you know, we might just stumble on something that's completely not what we wanted or what we need at this time. And not to be put off from that.

**Anna Duschinsky**

I like that. And I guess also through the journey, right, that that potential to tell ourselves stories about, oh, well I'm not progressing fast enough or I'm not, I can't see any difference, I still can't touch my toes and I've been doing it for four weeks. Whatever it is that we can tell ourselves about it, that might make us step away or give up. It sounds, listening to you, that a lot of your...

A lot of your insight and the joy that you take, obviously take from it now, has come with real persistence.

**Gail Aylward**

Yeah. Persistence and kindness, actually.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Interesting combination.

**Gail Aylward**

And I think a lot of us don't have a lot of kindness towards ourselves. You know, I talk a lot about the mind and the thoughts, but there's also, there can be that very judgmental part of our psychology that we all have, which is called the inner critic, or Mara in Buddhism. Just an inner critique voice. And that can put us down. And it can try and keep us down. And it's like, just realizing, oh, that's just part of having, being a personality, being a person.

And really trying to overcome that. So I think kindness is really important in practicing actually. It feels like, just to keep us there, to support us when perhaps the voices come in, or we start comparing ourselves to other people in the class, look at them, they're more agile, I can't do this. But realizing the breath is so important.

And I remember actually, really noticing the difference after a yoga class and thinking, what is it? Why am I feeling so much more kind of refreshed and just more alive.

And I realized it really was the breath, because for a long time, my breath was quite shallow. It would just come here. And with the yoga practices, we're being encouraged and invited to take deeper or longer breaths. And just the wonderful effects that has on us.

**Anna Duschinsky - [00:36:16]**

Yeah, just in that simple form, right. Just to breathe and allow that breath all the way through the body, as you say, kind of moving the body, I guess great for everything, for the lymph system...

**Gail Aylward**

Totally. Totally. Everything. And for really calming the nervous system, especially the outbreath.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Right. As you say, that kind of parasympathetic/sympathetic, and vagal nerve tone, and all of that, that's part of that breath and the calming as well as, I guess, moving the energy.

**Gail Aylward**

By moving the energy, yeah. And I guess what I appreciate about these practices also is that we can take them into daily life. It doesn't just stop on the mat, or on the cushion. We can find ourselves washing up or... well we can't queue at the moment... but queuing in supermarkets and it's like just becoming present to ourselves. It's an opportunity to take some deep breaths, just to reconnect.

So there's so many possibilities throughout the day that we can just keep coming back and connecting and healing, healing that which has gone on before.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Right and so the yoga, or the meditation, that also being a way of connecting, that's really lovely as well, isn't it. I find for me, if I'm doing lots on zoom, as I'm sure you are and everyone in the world is at the moment, even if it's ten minutes, just to sit and do a few practices or a few movements, it just, you know, there is a reconnection. There is a kind of, oh OK, yep here I am. I don't live in this weird screen space.

**Gail Aylward**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Anna Duschinsky**

So yoga as being a way of connecting, a way of creating awareness in the self as well, and of the body, of where we're holding, of where there's tension, of where the breath is and isn't perhaps, of beginning to calm the system through the breath and through some of the asanas if we perform them in that more gentle way. The breath's power, to calm and shift the, as you say, vagal tone, sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous system, the whole nervous system. And also to allow energy and, kind of breath, life to move through the system as well.

So all of those are huge, huge benefits, for anybody! But particularly if you're looking to heal, if you're looking to recover. And the importance of that. And I love what you're saying in terms of persistence but with kindness as well.

**Gail Aylward - [00:38:55]**

Yeah. Really taking it one step at a time, really understanding one's capacities and then taking time to really rest and look after yourself. I realized that I've really gone down that path of rest and relaxation. One, because I needed it. And I see how much lots of other people need it. Before they get to the point of the Chronic Fatigue, to step in there, to really support and look after themselves in an ongoing way.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Absolutely. So it seems almost silly to have you here, as this wonderful yoga and meditation teacher, and not ask you to do a little demo because everyone watching is going to be going, OK that all sounds amazing. So maybe to give us a little taste of some of that.

And the other thing I think that strikes me about what you're talking about, it feels really important through everything that I've watched over the years with clients, is that idea of our meditation being quite body based, being quite about connecting in. As you say, I think, and certainly I was one of them, meditating from a place where I'm kind of meditating out, if you like. But actually coming back into the body, into the breath.

And it feels like the way that you teach, is a very embodied, connecting way of meditating. So would you be up for offering us a few minutes?

**Gail Aylward**

Sure. I can do a few minutes.

**Anna Duschinsky**

All right. Over to you.

**Gail Aylward - [00:40:33]**

So, I'd just like to invite everyone just to either sit in a chair, or if you would like to sit or lay down on the ground, on a mat, maybe on a bed or sofa. And checking in, what do you need right now? Is sitting on the chair with the back straight feeling comfortable? Or on the floor with the legs crossed? Or is there a fatigue, a tiredness that you want to address, and if so, the invitation is to really look after yourself, to lay down, make yourself comfortable.

Once you have found the position that works for you, whether it's the floor, the chair, just taking a few deep body breaths. And this time, breathing in through the nose.

And as you exhale, breathing out through the mouth, with the mouth slightly open.

And just doing that a few more times. Breathing in through the nose. And out through the mouth.

Sensing and feeling the body. As you come and turn towards it with more awareness, more gentleness, more kindness.

Just noticing if there's any tension in the body as you sit or lay here. Maybe there might be some tension in the jaw and mouth. Perhaps in the shoulders and neck. Perhaps even in the stomach, holding in the stomach.

So really inviting a softening, a releasing and letting go as you breathe out.

Now, just turning the attention towards this breath. Feeling the air arrive through the nostrils. The chest expand. Maybe the abdomen expand as well as you breathe in.

And as you breathe out, sensing the stomach relaxing, the chest relaxing as the the air moves back out.

If you notice the attention is being caught up, grabbed by the mind, no problem. Just, unhooking and returning to this breath.

Noticing the different qualities of the breath. Does it feel soft? Or is it a rough breath? Is it a short or long breath? Does it feel like a full bodied breath, or a thin breath?

From here, the invitation is breathing in, fully. And then as you breathe out, really allowing the outbreath in its fullness, as the stomach moves towards the lower back.

So we're just lengthening, elongating the breath, slightly, breathing in, perhaps more fully than you would. Feeling the chest, the stomach expand.

And breathing out, the stomach relaxes, chest releases.

Just doing that a few more times, a couple more breaths. Really sensing the breath from the inside.

From there, the invitation would be to sense the lowest part where the breath lands in the body.

So for some of you that may be the chest. For some, it may be the stomach. Just really feeling into the lowest part, and then just allowing the attention to rest there.

Sensing and feeling the expansion as you breathe in. And the release and relaxation, as you breathe out.

And the body may show up, you may notice some tension in some parts of the body. And if that arises, just breathing more fully, more deeply in that part. And then returning again, the attention, kind attention to the breath.

Staying there for however long you would like to. I'm going to end with a bell. Please feel free to stay where you are and continue this very gentle meditation.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

Lovely, I could say there. Definitely. Gentle is the word, right?

### **Gail Aylward**

Yeah, definitely, I think that's been very much part of my own inner journey, is that kindness and gentleness for oneself.

### **Anna Duschinsky**

So if, after watching this, people want to know more about you and the work you and Martin are doing, where can they do that?

### **Gail Aylward**

Well they can contact our center or go to the website of our center, Moulin de Chaves [moulindechaves.org](http://moulindechaves.org) or [moulindechaves@gmail.com](mailto:moulindechaves@gmail.com)

And I have my own website, which should be finished any day now. And that's [mindful-mentoring.com](http://mindful-mentoring.com) and that's where I meet clients and offering the years of study and my own experience and just offering, mostly people who are on this practice and meditators, if they want to understand what's arising as they practice and want some support, then I offer mentoring in that.

**Anna Duschinsky - [00:50:28]**

Wonderful. And are you doing any online classes or retreats at the moment still, or is that moving back to in person?

**Gail Aylward**

The two will happen in person at the Moulin de Chaves in the summer. Fingers crossed. All going well. Living in southwest France, we're just in our lockdown, as I know that people in the UK are just coming out of theirs.

And I'm assisting with a friend's retreat at [Gaia House](#), a meditation centre, in April. And again, I'll be teaching with Martin at Gaia House, who knows whether it will be online, but all the details are on my website so you can find things there. And particularly, the Rest, Relax and Renew retreat in August, which is a lovely time of year to be here.

And I made this retreat because it's the retreat, the sort of retreat I would have liked to have attended. So it's a silent retreat, there's lots of, there's gentle yoga in the morning, restorative practice in the afternoon, and meditation supporting this throughout the day.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Well, it sounds amazing. And thank you so much for sharing your experience, your journey with us today and your thoughts. And thank you everybody, as well for watching and for listening today.

**Gail Aylward**

Thank you, Anna. It's been a pleasure to be here.

**Anna Duschinsky**

Same here. Thank you.