



Conscious Life presents

Restorative Yoga for Trauma Support

Guest - Adelene Cheong

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Adelene Cheong. She met yoga in her early twenties and very soon followed her passion to teach and share this ancient practice. Born in Malaysia, she spent her time between Europe and Asia traveling and teaching.

Adelene believes in supporting and guiding her students to unveil their fullest potential. She's particularly interested in the therapeutic applications of yoga. Her classes are inquiry-based, educational and exploratory, reflective and empowering.

Based in London now, Adelene teaches internationally with a special interest in scoliosis, somatic movements, Restorative Yoga and Yoga Nidra meditation. She's a trainer and mentor on various reputable yoga teacher training and Yoga Therapy programs. Adelene, thank you so much for joining us today.

Adelene Cheong

Hello everyone. Thanks for having me.

Meagen Gibson

So I want to start by talking about what is Restorative Yoga?

Adelene Cheong

Restorative Yoga is a relaxation practice to support conscious, deep rest. It is a nervous system practice, specifically where we consciously choose to position the body in a position of ease and comfort to facilitate a physiological change in the body experience so that the nervous system could rebalance to homeostasis.

[00:01:42] Meagen Gibson

It's so interesting to hear you say that because I'm sure that people with overly active brains like mine, they hear "getting you ready for rest". Especially the people who are really into very active, very engaging yoga that makes them sweat or makes their legs shake or things like that. And they're like, "Why would I want to do that"?

But what you said about "inducing physiological change", I think if I quoted you correctly, is so important. Because a lot of times we're amped up or we're in a trauma response or we've been activated by something and we want to relax and we're telling ourselves to relax.

And I would love it if you described a little more in detail how putting your body in specific positions through educated guidance, through somebody like yourself, can signal to your body the way to relax, instead of you being like, "Relax now. Now it's time to settle down".

Adelene Cheong

Yeah, I love to speak more about trauma in a moment, but pertaining to what you've just said, it's exactly that. How do we communicate to the nervous system to down-regulate or to rev up when necessary? We do need that.

Even now, as we are speaking, we do need our sympathetic presence and stimulation to be able to articulate and focus and pay attention, make sense of conversation. So that's necessary. But at the same time, how could we also down-regulate so that we could also be in parasympathetic dominance, where rest and digest and regulation happens.

The physiology of relaxation is as such, that the heart rate slows down, the breathing rate slows down. These are measurable things in the body to inform that this person is moving into relaxation. And with Restorative Yoga, we are using a very nonverbal, because the nervous system is nonverbal. The nervous system doesn't understand vocabulary, but it does understand experiences.

So when there's a shift in temperature, pressure on the body, when the body physically feels comfortable, at ease, effortless, feels safe, that's where the nervous system just shifts. Okay, I'm going to shift from this highly stimulated place to a quieter place because there's no information coming in to entertain me, to interact with.

So in yoga, we call that state also as pratyahara, where there is a reduced to no stimulation, that not just the body, but also the body and mind could be at a quiet place for restoration to happen.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And so much of what you said I want to revisit, because you made a really great point about sympathetic and energy and how we need it sometimes. So many of us, myself included, maybe I'm just speaking for myself, have that after lunch slump. Where our concentration and our focus starts to wane, and we would really like to take a nap.

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I have developed a practice after lunch that I call the couch is lava. I'm not allowed to sit on the couch because if I sit on the couch, there will be a nap happening. And so I've had to learn other ways to give myself the rest that my body is signaling that I would like, and that would be restorative without falling asleep. Without just surrendering to a three hour afternoon nap, because I just don't have the time in my day for that.

So things like a walk or things like fresh air. That's what's so beautiful about yoga, and the fact that we call it a practice. If you stick with it long enough and you take enough different modalities with the different teachers and tune into some of our sessions here at the conference, you learn different applications for different needs of your body. And how to listen to what your body's asking for and then how to respond to it appropriately through the practices that you learn here.

Adelene Cheong

That's exactly why I appreciate this conference, is that there's so many different approaches. There's bound to be one that is convenient and fitting for the person's lifestyle, or how it could fit into your schedule, your life. If there's young children around. If there's nine to five work commitments. If there's only one thing from this conference - it could be a five minute thing, it could be a 1 minute thing or an extended 30 minutes practice where you could fit it into your weekend or something.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. And so when we're talking about learning restorative practices and learning how to listen to our body's sensations, signals, and putting these things into practice for healing, what is the scale of how long it takes and how often one should practice in order to build resiliency and heal trauma?

Adelene Cheong

Yeah, let's talk a little bit about trauma. Trauma is where the nervous system no longer has the capacity, or it's stretched beyond its capacity to self-regulate, to down-regulate. We use the term down-regulate from sympathetic arousal and dominance to a place where it's restful and rejuvenating and quiet.

So that inability is the issue, rather than the nervous system is the problem. Nervous system is never the problem. We all have a nervous system that is actually very crucial, important to survive as a person, as a human. So the nervous system is never the problem. It's the ability to regulate the nervous system where trauma is stuck, basically stuck on this switched on place of sympathetic arousal.

So how long would it take? It could take as much as just 1 minute, literally a few seconds, few breaths, 1 minute of regulation. And if that regulates your nervous system, that's it. But of course, if there is a chronic, long-term thing that one is dealing with, then regular 1 minute dosage. Or when there is time, a five minute, 15 minutes practice would gradually build a stronger container and resiliency for the nervous system to be able to regulate any fluctuations.

[00:08:51] Meagen Gibson

And I love that framework, too, because one of the things that gets misunderstood the most, in my experience, is resiliency, and the concept of resiliency. And people often misunderstand that resiliency comes from just facing adversity. When facing adversity without support creates trauma.

And so it's not just adversity and getting through it, it's being supported through it. And one of the practices beyond other people in our life, supporting us and holding us up when we experience adversity, is the way that we support ourselves and the practices and the tools that we have at our disposal to meet ourselves where we have adversity.

And so I'd love to talk a little bit more about how yoga, and you mentioned touch earlier, and weight and things like that. How is touch incorporated into healing trauma in Restorative Yoga?

Adelene Cheong

Yeah, I did offer two recorded practices. One of the practices is nervous system regulation through touch. And that really, it's one of my 1 minute go to thing for myself, and also I teach it lots. But of course, it could also be extended, if you enjoy it and the nervous system is really in that zone of regulation, then of course, feel free to extend the time of touch.

But what I meant by touch is... I mentioned earlier that the nervous system's language is not this vocabulary. What we are speaking right now is really to entertain the cognitive mind. The cognitive mind likes this, likes to understand and talk about things and narrate.

But really, the nervous system doesn't care whether that is French or Spanish or Chinese. It perceives touch through the sensory nerves. So sensory nerves are all over the body, and there are many receptors that take in information. One of the receptors that measures touch pressure is called mechanoreceptors. And it is surface and deep.

And I'm particularly highlighting this aspect of touch in the practice. The two practices this time in this conference, to use through touch, through pressure and contact to communicate with the nervous system that nothing is going in, nothing is coming out, there's no effort, and you are safe. And there is no imposition or demand on the nervous system that you can just be, you can just be present and just be, and there's no doing. So that place is to be communicated to the nervous system nonverbally.

Meagen Gibson

I love that as a setting and a container for this talk, too, because just as you said, a 1 minute practice. The first time you practice that 1 minute practice, and you're communicating with the sensations in your body and touch, that you're safe and that there's nothing to do and there's nothing to think through this may not go the way you want it to.

Your mind might not just shut off and be quiet, but 1 minute a day or 1 minute twice a day for 30 days or 60 days becomes two minutes becomes four minutes. It's a cumulative rebuilding of self-trust in your nervous system. Would that be fair?

[00:12:38] Adelene Cheong

Absolutely. Yeah, you've got it!

Meagen Gibson

Because of teachers like you.

The other thing I was thinking, too, as you were speaking, is the comparison, the analogy I was making in my head is around music. And a lot of types of music have two components. It's the music itself and then lyrics. The lyrics are like our cognitive brain, projecting meaning onto things or assigning meaning through words.

But then the music is a totally different thing that's going to evoke a feeling that could be in complete contrast to the actual lyrics and the message. And so those two things evoke a feeling, but they aren't necessarily the same feeling. I hope people are following along. The lyrics could be really sad and very deep and very meaningful. And the music could be very energetic and upbeat and more of a happy feeling.

Adelene Cheong

Yeah, and I have to highlight that it's also very personal. Sometimes the tempo or certain vocabulary, certain words trigger certain people. It makes sense to certain people more than others. And it's our association, it's our culture, it's a lot of things that's behind. That's why I appreciate this practice, the restorative practice, because it's beyond vocabulary and language and culture.

It's just the nervous system, which everyone has one, every human being has one. And we speak through the language of primordial touch. It's a primordial thing because this receptor, it's already present in utero. It's before we even have a brain. It's before we even have this body that's functioning and breathing after birth, so that we already experience contact pressure, comfort through this gentle pressure.

So when I refer to touch, I have to say that it's also very personal. I did explain this in the recorded practices. Some might enjoy a big, strong hug, being hugged and being held, and some might just enjoy a very gentle pet and a gentle holding. And that is, again, your flavor, your personal experience with touch and pressure on your body.

Meagen Gibson

It's interesting, too, because I find that a lot of people haven't spent a lot of time thinking about how they want to be touched or what kind of touch feels good. They might be really familiar with what doesn't feel good, or they might not even be familiar with that.

And it's through teachers like you and doing your practices in our past conferences, I've been able to not only figure this out for myself, but also communicate it to my kids. It's been very interesting. I have one kid who really, really enjoys a very light touch, and therefore, he thinks other people like that touch.

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And so he'll do that. He'll stroke my arm and I'll be like, "Wow, buddy, I really appreciate that you're trying to show me affection. I really don't like the way that feels". I was like, "However, I do like this". And I'll show him, "I like a nice hard squeeze or a firmer touch, that feels good to my body". And he'll be, "Oh, okay". And he'll default to what he likes to do. And then he'll go, "Oh, yeah, mom, I remember you like this, but I like my back scratched lately".

Yeah, exactly. We find comfort in different ways because we all have a different relationship to our nervous system and what it's trying to communicate.

Adelene Cheong

Yeah. And what we make out of it, of that information. Touch, sensory nerves, it's basically just there to take in information. So it's just collecting information about pressure, a different level of pressure, intensity, rhythm. So, it's a personal flavor.

Meagen Gibson

And none of it's wrong. It's just information, like you said.

Adelene Cheong

And what I offer in the practice, it's called neutral touch. The idea at whatever different level pressure that you enjoy, lighter pressure or firmer, assured pressure. The intention is when we touch that we are not fixing and giving information, but also not dissipating information. It's just neutral. So that the body. There's no information coming in or going out in that process of touch.

Meagen Gibson

More of an observer of sensation.

Adelene Cheong

Yes, and bring us back to a meditative state. Meditate, being present with just what is and really being present and accepting where we are. Exactly where we are. Not having to see it as an illness or a weakness or something wrong with the body. But it's just the nervous system responding and we are being present with it to regulate, to be able to self-regulate for health.

Meagen Gibson

You have several practices, not only in the larger conscious life membership that people have access to, but in this particular conference, you have a couple of sessions. So what is your suggestion on where to begin for those who are healing their trauma?

[00:18:37] Adelene Cheong

I definitely would recommend exploring all the practices on the conference because there must be something that works for you, for each person. But in terms of the two practices that I offer. One is a shorter practice where I said the 1 minute practice, but it is about 15 minutes because I was explaining and initially guiding someone, whoever's watching through the practice where you can then shorten it in your own time.

So learn and experience the touch on yourself, on your body. This is self-touch. Or you can also offer it to someone else, but really start from self-touch so that you could sense and feel the pressure and contact and the intention of the touch.

That's the keyword. The intention of the touch, not about fixing. So that's a shorter practice where you can go through a couple of times. Once you're familiar with it, you can use it at any time of the day, anywhere on the go, because you don't need to lie down and be anywhere specific.

You just need to have your hand on a part of your body, on your heart, on your head, on your brain. And you could do this, you could be on a train or something, traveling, but not when you're driving probably.

Meagen Gibson

Right, safety first.

Adelene Cheong

Yeah, safety first. And the second practice is an extended practice where I bring in a restorative pose with the use of props to facilitate this experience of hugging and this touch, using props to communicate that. So throughout that restful 15 minutes, 20 minutes of stay, of course, has to be physically comfortable.

I demonstrated some options in the video and also to modulate how much wrapping pressure of the blanket around the body, which is personal flavor, personal preference.

That's something that hopefully could, over time, build resiliency for a nervous system to recognize that this is another option to be in the world. This is another way to show up ourselves in the world, that the nervous system basically would be able to toggle between the polarities of sympathetic and parasympathetic dominance.

Meagen Gibson

Well, I hope everybody checks it out. Both practices will benefit your life and your healing. Adelene, where can people find out more about you and your work?

Adelene Cheong

I think on the bio there will be [my website](#) where you can read a little bit more about Restorative Yoga, about my approach to somatic touch, somatic healing and work. It's self-exploration. It's self-development, self-care, self-exploration. So I highly encourage you to explore.

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Yes, with me. But also, there's just so many really wonderful speakers on this conference and so many practices. Find something that works for you. I really wish, deeply wish, that whoever is watching, you'll find something for yourself.

I want to say there is hope. There is hope. And I'm one of the survivors, so I can vouch for it. But yeah, keep in touch and hopefully see some of you on the mat. Email me. Contact me via my website.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. Adelene, we appreciate your contributions to our practices and also these talks that we get to have. Thank you so much for being with us.

Adelene Cheong

Thank you. Namaste.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you.