

Purifying Your Love

*First Sarah Powers Interviewed by Raz Ingrasci
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Raz: Is yoga a spiritual practice, a physical practice, or both?

Sarah: It's a practice to free the mind. Yoga is a jump-off point from which we begin uncovering our true nature. Its goal is liberation. Yoga is a set of practices that moves us toward resting in our true nature.

There are Yoga schools that have a view of liberation as way off in the distance, and which don't much use the physical body. They want us to turn away from any identification of being physical. Then there are other branches that are non-dualistic and more ancient in which the aim of our practice is to uncover a nature that's already there, simply shrouded. Liberation is seen as an unchanging, fundamental substratum of existence that we don't pay attention to because of our externalized consciousness and our training. Yogic practices allow us to see inwardly what's really going on, not just what our intellect is preferring to understand.

Raz: Isn't that also the aim of meditation?

Sarah: Meditation is the main tool of yoga. The physical practices that are so popular are preliminary practices so that we're less agitated and energy is clean and clear enough to sit still and investigate the nature of reality.

Raz: As a yoga teacher, you teach postures, don't you?

Sarah: Yes. Hatha yoga is a practice that uses the body as the jump-off place. We start with what's tangible, relative, and continually changing – which is the physical condition of health and stagnation – and we move our attention into the form of being a body. So you start with the densest form of energy and you then refine your awareness. When someone begins yoga, just being attentive to one's feet or how your shoulders are as they're moving around, can be difficult. The attention easily wanders. Hatha yoga says, "Come be in your body, come just pay attention to your breath, and allow the body to find its natural equilibrium through these various postures or shapes that

rechannel and redistribute energy.” It’s the redistribution of Prana, Prana being energy, or chi.

You just naturally feel better when the body is more enlivened and less congested energetically. The idea is that you go from feeling more at home in the body to then attending to something less tangible, which is the subtle body. So there are Pranayama practices that take the intensity of balancing your energy to a more subtle level. The mind is intimately connected to the breath. So as we connect the attention to the body, to the breath, the mind also comes along and is then more willing to be present to watch its own workings. Meditation was around long before Hatha yoga, but there were schools of people who felt it was too advanced to just sit and watch your mind. People were uncomfortable in their bodies. The mind was too agitated, which would create guilt and dissatisfaction from meditation. These yogis thought, “Okay, let’s work with the body and the breath, and the mind will naturally come home.”

That was true for me. I tried to meditate when I was 20 and there was no anchor, no root for me. I found Hatha yoga and it was a way in. After 10 years of Hatha yoga, I was ready to challenge stillness and meditate. Some people will meditate much sooner than I did, but it took 10 years of committed practice before I was really willing to tackle restlessness

Raz: Was the Hoffman Process part of tackling your restlessness?

Sarah: Before starting yoga, Ty, my husband who also did the Process, introduced me to writers who were looking at the nature of reality. My entry was intellectual, because my background was in English literature. I was in college and loved to read, so I was interested in looking at reality with a different lens. I would read writers, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Castaneda, Seth Speaks, and Ken Wilbur, and there was a feeling of sitting in-side their expansive views for very short pockets of time. I would intellectually understand what they were saying. It was at that time that I became interested in looking at all the places where I was misidentified and stuck. So, I found a therapist and joined the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology for a masters program. The masters program required that we do spiritual practice with a physical base, so I started yoga.

Mentally, I was interested in watching my mind, but not for very long periods – sitting for 15 minutes was enough for me. The spiritual connection was that after the practice I felt more expansive. It would last for awhile, and over the years it would last a little longer. But eventually, the old patterns would settle

in. I would crave yoga because that seemed like a remedy. When the Hoffman Process came to my attention, I felt like there were strong rooted patterns that I wanted to weed out that would allow me to blossom in yoga.

Raz: So what happened?

Sarah: I was skeptical. I came with all my doubts and resistances because that was what I really wanted to work on. I just let it become my full persona. I gave the Teachers a really hard time. I have a nature that can be so discerning that I don't even check things out. The first few days, I felt like, "they're not going to be able to touch my stuff. I'm going to be the only one who leaves exactly the same as I came in." For every exercise, resistance was the first pattern that would come up. I knew very well that as long as I resisted, they wouldn't be able to unravel me. But that resistance to looking at and releasing my patterns was exactly what I wanted to work on. I was resisting all the stuff I'd learned about resistance from my folks. During that intense exercise about the parents being gone, there was the feeling of effortlessly and completely letting go.

I then started trusting that everything we had done prior had allowed me to get to that place, and now I was willing.

Sages talk about the main hindrance to awakening is resistance in moments of failure, resisting who we are. Resistance was a force pulling me into a cloud of discontent, wherein I thought that circumstances would someday arrange into a configuration where I'd finally be happy. So Hoffman was when I realized, "I'm tired of expecting that circumstances are going to give it to me."

Raz: What have you found since Hoffman?

Sarah: Right after the Process, after the weekend by myself, I went on a weeklong silent retreat with my Tibetan teacher. It was really nice sequencing. It was like he was speaking to me, talking about patterns. I don't remember hearing him use that language before, but that week, it was so lovely.

I'd been on retreat with him a year before, and this was a repeat retreat, so it was basically the same but I heard it totally different this time. I heard it from a place that wasn't looking for answers to make me feel worthy. I found that worthiness was already my essential nature. So, hearing these teachings was like going from the base of "already lovable" into the substratum of love that is all around us all the time. It was a lovely segue to being back in my life.

Before Hoffman I'd go on meditation retreats always with this subtle undercurrent that I was going to make myself sit with my discontent. Almost like punishment. "If you sit here long enough, you'll get over it." After Hoffman, there's no sense that I'm here to fight something in me, that I'm beating myself up because I'm no good. Of course, there are moments of discontent, and I see now that the discontent is historical. It's a pattern, it's not really there It's just a groove that my mind was used to. Now there's much more joy.

Raz: Many people enter yoga or meditation to seek "enlightenment". How do you view your path?

Sarah: It's been 20 years and now it's a surrendering path. I used to think it was a path to "do"; that there was something to acquire. My ego got wrapped around whether I was doing well or not. Now it feels like there have been glimpses of liberation being so close that it's the very apparatus we use to express through. It's nothing we can find; it's simply evoked. I'm very interested in resting in it more and more, and less interested in the "doing" aspect, which becomes busy and distracting.

Raz: It's not something to attain any more.

Sarah: No, that's a concept. It was something too far away to grasp and it created its own level of suffering.

Raz: I've heard that the word yoga means union.

Sarah: Yes. Yoga means, "to yoke". It's a path that directs us to our inherent wholeness

Raz: It sounds like yoga, meditation and Hoffman all have a similar goal, which I would call purifying your love.

Sarah: In my recognition of what I'm not, which is conditioned patterns, what I am is so much clearer; which is what we all are -love. Hoffman was a way of penetrating the illusion of unworthiness that I've carried since childhood: that is a choice I no longer feel compelled to make.