

Yogic Rewilding:  
Towards An Environmental Yoga Therapy



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# Introduction

In this study, I will explore the role of nature in the practice of yoga, considering ways in which it can be integrated into one's practice to inform and deepen the experience of moving the body. Furthermore, I will consider why drawing on the natural world in one's yoga practice may be regarded as important on a personal, societal as well as ecological level, hereby reinforcing the views expressed by prominent writers on yoga who have called for the 'necessary convergence between yogic spirituality and social activism focusing on ecological concerns'.<sup>1</sup>

This study plots the journey to-date of my own ongoing explorations into a specific approach to yoga posture | *asana* practice, that I will go on to call *Yogic Rewilding*. I fully appreciate that the framing of yoga that I am suggesting is a deeply personal one, and that precise instructions for its practice would, therefore, undermine the entire approach. Rather, it is my intention here to offer some inspiration and resources that may be useful to those who are seeking a way to engage with their practice in specific relation to the natural world and the global problems we face. Furthermore, I hope that this body of work will eventually inform my teaching of weekly Hatha yoga classes as well as short courses and workshops. It is my wish to ultimately compose a system of working with yoga that may be termed *environmental yoga therapy*, concerned with both personal and ecological healing.

Fundamental to the practice of *Yogic Rewilding* is my belief that movement in relationship to an environment, whether that be a green or urban environment, is one way of practising yoga that can bring us more fully into our embodied selves and heal our disconnection from the natural world and its rhythmical cycles, which, it will be argued, lies at the root of much human dis-ease. Furthermore, by reconnecting with nature in this way, as individuals, I believe that a wider process of ecological rebalancing will occur quite naturally. Indeed, our own inner sense of balance is to be seen as closely connected to our ability to live in balanced relationship to our environment.<sup>2</sup> It is my belief that the current ecological climate suggests that there is a pressing need in the world for such a form of

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Feuerstein, 'Eco Yoga', *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice* (Shambhala: Boston, 2003), pp.210-214 (p.211). See also Michael Stone, *Yoga for a World Out of Balance: Teachings on Ethics and Social Action* (Shambhala: Boston and London, 2009). Stone echoes similar views.

<sup>2</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension of Yoga*, p.210.

movement therapy, which is essentially what Yogic Rewilding is. We live in a world that is out of balance, and in this study, I will present Yogic Rewilding as a practice that can contribute to the restoration of balance: ‘Spiritual change, psychological change, and ethical change go hand in hand, forming together an interconnected path of awakening.’<sup>3</sup> I will argue that it is possible for what is essentially a highly personal practice to contribute to socio-ecological change.

I regard this study as part of a growing body of literature emerging that responds to a human longing for wilderness and the wild. It is also part of a growing body of yoga texts that signals a movement away from the body as *mechanistic object*, and instead points towards the body as *process*.<sup>4</sup>

In the first part of this study, I will define the key term, *rewilding*, and situate it within the context of yoga. I’ll also identify some influential voices which have helped to refine my understanding of the concept. In Part II, I will introduce the specific aspects that define the practice of Yogic Rewilding, as I have envisioned it. Part III is offered by way of conclusion. Here, I aim to summarise my findings, bringing them into a coherent whole, and identify pathways for further exploration.

Quotations are interspersed between pages of the main text, aiming to provide additional inspiration while also encouraging a slowing down of the rapid pace of life, which I believe further disconnects us from the natural world and its rhythms. These quotations will hopefully create spaciousness: a moment in which to pause and reflect, and into which the possibility of reconnecting with something bigger than ourselves can occur. *A Journal Of Yogic Rewilding* also accompanies this study. As well as documenting parts of my own journey

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<sup>3</sup> Stone, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Liz Koch, *Core Awareness: Enhancing Yoga, Pilates, Exercise and Dance*, rev. edn (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p.8. Koch gives a concise summary of shifting attitudes to movement, explaining how the idea of the body as machine was born during the Industrial Revolution, when wo/man was valued for physical output. For a socio-political discussion of this subject, see Charlene Spretnak, *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p.19. For examples of approaches to yoga that are more concerned with the body as *process*, see Vanda Scaravelli’s *Awakening the Spine: The Stress-Free New Yoga that Works with the Body to Restore Health, Vitality and Energy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p.110. Scaravelli describes yoga as ‘a living process that changes moment by moment’. See also Peter Blackaby’s *Intelligent Yoga: Re-educating Mind and Body* (Stroud: Outhouse Publishing, 2012). See also Sandra Sabatini and Silvia Mori, *autumn, winter, spring, summer: yoga through the seasons* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2008; repr. 2009). See also John Stirk’s *The Original Body: Primal Movement for Yoga Teachers* (Pencaitland: Handspring Publishers, 2015).

into the process of rewilding through imagery and fragments of written word, it is also intended as an organic resource that will inspire my teaching.

## A Final Introductory Note

Despite my wish to inspire a deeper connection to the natural world, I do not mean to imply that the practice of Yogic Rewilding necessitates practising outdoors in nature, although spending more time outdoors might happen as a natural (and beneficial) by-product of the practice.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there may well be practical reasons to limit the scope and feasibility of a regular open air practice. So, while Yogic Rewilding may mean practising yoga asana in the green of nature, it may also mean drawing the qualities of an environment - green or urban - or our responses to a particular environment, into our practice on the mat.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on a predominantly indoor mat-based practice, while encouraging personal exploration outdoors when possible and appropriate. The accompanying *Journal Of Yogic Rewilding* provides examples of my own

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<sup>5</sup> Lots of interesting scientific studies into the benefits of nature on our well-being exist, and which find time and time again that natural environments offer respite to the demands placed on our attention during our modern day lives. For example, Stephen Kaplan, 'The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Towards an Integrative Framework', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15 (1995), 169-182. See also R. S. Ulrich, 'Effects of gardens on health outcomes: theory and research', in *Healing Gardens; Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations*, ed. by M. C. Cooper and M. Barnes (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999). Ulrich found that patients in hospital recovered sooner and took less medication when they were given views onto a green space, when compared with patients who looked onto urban spaces. Although much of the literature is about the effects of spending time in nature or looking at nature, I believe that working with nature on the mat (for example, using visualisation, or by exploring one's relationship to the environment through which ones moves) can also bring benefits, and will naturally proceed to inspire practitioners to spend more quality time outdoors and in environments deemed restorative.

<sup>6</sup> Having spent my childhood in the countryside, and my adulthood rather reluctantly living in cities, I have been particularly keen to find peace with what I had come to regard as the hostile urban environment. Yoga has been an important part of that process, and I have been inspired to reconnect with urban environments by the presentation of the city given in Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *A Widening Field* (Alton: Dance Books, 2004), p.250. They write, 'We are drawn to cities as places of adventure, of opportunity, not knowing who or what we may meet - anything seems possible. In the city we can come out of ourselves, break our routines, be anonymous, get lost. And as we look at faces, hear voices, we find ourselves surrounded by extremes of otherness - people quite unlike ourselves, with unfamiliar features, dress habits, languages, ways of being. These extremes of difference shake up our own sense of how things are.' There is certainly material to inspire the process of Yogic Rewilding within urban spaces. See also the *Journal Of Yogic Rewilding* that accompanies this study, which contains some of my own examples of how urban environments have influenced my yoga practice.

responses to various environments and shows how they provided material for exploration on my yoga mat, whereas suggestions for supplementary practices that can be practised outdoors are given in Appendix I.

# Rewilding, Yogic Rewilding, And Why It Matters

I was introduced to the concept of *rewilding* by the writer and political activist, George Monbiot, in his book *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life*.<sup>7</sup> For Monbiot, rewilding is about allowing the entire ecosystem, formed of ever-shifting dynamic relationships between species and their environments, to come back into a state of balance.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, rewilding isn't about humans imposing preconceived notions of what balance looks like on the natural world, but about allowing the dynamic relationships by which we are all held, to interplay as they will, and to eventually find their own harmonious state of inter-being.<sup>9</sup> It's about trusting in the self-regulatory capacity of the Earth, which as a living entity, will naturally seek balance.<sup>10</sup>

Of course we humans are a part of things too. We are effectively made of the same stuff, and we are woven into the web of life, ultimately unified with all things. But for too long we've regarded nature as something external to ourselves - an 'abstraction'.<sup>11</sup> We've come to regard ourselves as superior, perhaps through fear of acknowledging the extent to which we are dependent on her, such is our belief in the virtues of independence, power and control.<sup>12</sup> We've effectively become disconnected, and it is this state of disconnection that has made the exploitation of the Earth possible.<sup>13</sup> As well as being in denial of our state of

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<sup>7</sup> George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life*, reprint (London: Allen Lane, 2013; repr. London: Penguin, 2014), p.8. He explains how the concept first entered the dictionary in 2011 to refer to the release of captive animals into the wild. The definition has since expanded to encompass entire ecosystems and a restoration of wilderness.

<sup>8</sup> Monbiot, pp.8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Monbiot, p,9.

<sup>10</sup> Spretnak, p.23. 'It is now increasingly apparent that the entire universe - from vast galaxies to microscopic cells - unfolds through systems of spontaneous self-organization.' Such ideas entered into mainstream thinking thanks to scientists such as James Lovelock. See James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Monbiot, p.13. See also John R Stowe, *The Findhorn Book of Connecting with Nature* (Scotland: Findhorn Press, 2003), p.8. Stowe points out that even within the environmental movement, the Earth is spoken about as something distinct and separate from ourselves, as though we are not part of the dynamics of life.

<sup>12</sup> Koch, p.70.

<sup>13</sup> Spretnak, p.11. Spretnak names 'distancing' and 'disconnection' as shaping forces of modern life, constituting the common ground of humanity.

interdependence, we also seem to disregard the fact that we share common origins with all expressions of life. As such, we have lost any sense of belonging, and without that, there is little meaning to our existence. We've become caught up in the small dimensions of our own worlds, oblivious to the bigger picture that ultimately gives our lives meaning. So, while our own sense of mental well-being depends on us reconnecting, our Earth needs us to be re-integrated back into the whole too. Our Earth is willing it, even, in order that the whole flourishes and thrives. I don't believe that it is a matter of coincidence that we are witnessing a mental health crisis in an age where our disconnection from nature is more apparent than ever.<sup>14</sup> The rapid pace of technological developments and the emergence of a virtual world have certainly taken the state of human disconnection to a new level.<sup>15</sup> In this so-called *era of communication*, 'Technology has connected people like never before but [it] also deprives us of truly deep connection.'<sup>16</sup> Our human disconnection from nature can clearly be seen as detrimental from both a personal and ecological perspective.

Monbiot himself identifies our human need for a deeper connection to the natural world. He writes: 'an unmet need for a wilder life might have caused a remarkable collective delusion, from which many thousands of people now suffer.'<sup>17</sup> This need appears an urgent one as he describes his own experience of 'scratching at the walls of this life, hoping to find a way into a wilder space beyond'.<sup>18</sup> Yet, despite the title of his book, he only lightly touches on the rewilding of human life, and it is into this space left by Monbiot that I wish to move, suggesting that yoga can be practised in such a way to support the process of rewilding that Monbiot calls for. Furthermore, I believe that starting with the rewilding of ourselves is the

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<sup>14</sup> There are many thinkers and writers who have made a direct association between the disconnection from nature and a deterioration in the state of our health, particularly our mental health. For example, Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010). In this seminal work, he coined the term *Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

<sup>15</sup> Louv, *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age*, repr. edn (New York: Algonquin Books, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Purdy, 'Rewilding Human Nature', *Positive News*, no. 84 (2016) <<https://www.positive.news/2016/environment/20749/rewilding-human-nature/>> [accessed 19 May 2017]

<sup>17</sup> Monbiot, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> Monbiot, p.11. See also Rebecca Hosking quoted in Lucy Purdy, 'Rewilding Human Nature', *Positive News*, no. 84 (2016) <<https://www.positive.news/2016/environment/20749/rewilding-human-nature/>> [accessed 19 May 2017]. 'We feel pent up, trapped, and a need for fresh air and the outside world. While we are all aware of how we have domesticated animals, we tend to forget that we have also caged ourselves'.

best place to start if we want to contribute to the rebalancing of the ecosystem. Focusing on the rebalancing of ourselves may indeed be the most effective change we can make if we are committed to the idea of reshaping the world.<sup>19</sup> We live in troubled times, and perhaps it's not that we have to set about changing the material world, but rather, that we can embrace our yoga practice as a means to understand ourselves more fully, eventually transforming ourselves, and hereby participating in a wider process of renewal. If we make an effort to reconnect with nature and its rhythms, and bring ourselves back into greater balance, I believe that we will contribute to the unfolding of a better, and more sustainable world:

Humanity is living in ways that are severely out-of-balance with the natural systems that support us [...]. The move toward alignment will only take place when we decide, one person at a time, to live in more harmonious ways.<sup>20</sup>

In line with Monbiot's definition of rewilding, Yogic Rewilding is to be understood as a particular approach to yoga that is not about imposing yet another form on the body, but about resisting the urge to control and confine her, trusting in her own inherent wisdom, and allowing her the time and space to find expression and bring realignment and balance back to the organism as a whole. As microcosms of the Earth herself, 'We are self-correcting systems profoundly capable of self-healing.'<sup>21</sup> Yogic Rewilding is, therefore, a system of yoga that challenges some Western interpretations of yoga that have become prevalent in more recent times. Furthermore, the current mental health crisis leads me to believe that we have an urgent need for practices such as Yogic Rewilding, which can bring us back into direct contact with nature and re-integrate us back into the web of life. Such practices are essential in working against the tide of disconnection to which many other aspects of modern society contribute. Yogic Rewilding is essentially a process of deep reconnection that allows us to

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<sup>19</sup> Rachel Corby, *Rewild Yourself: Becoming Nature* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), p.18. This is the belief of Corby, who writes, 'I believe the first step in reclaiming areas of land and habitat, to saving, refurbishing, *rewilding* them, is to find the wild place inside, to rewild yourself [...] overcome a little of your very own domestication.' When we take the time to do that, Corby writes, 'The whole ecosystem responds and strengthens'.

<sup>20</sup> Stowe, pp.120-1.

<sup>21</sup> Koch, p.XXV.

take our place in ‘the family of things’, and return to our natural state of balance.<sup>22</sup> This is yoga then, meaning *to yoke* | *unite*, in the truest sense of the word.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Oliver, ‘Wild Geese’, in *Dream Work* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), p.14.

<sup>23</sup> Stone, p.1. See also p.15. Stone writes, ‘The term “yoga” connotes the basic unity and interconnectedness of all life [...] Yoga is the reality of leaving nothing out.’ Again, see p.61: ‘There is a kinship built into everything and our realisation of this is encapsulated by the term “yoga”.’ See also Colcord, in Sabatini and Mori, *seasons*, p.186. Sabatini gives a rich and somewhat poetic description of the meaning of yoga: ‘Yoga is a way of linking up and making connections. Between high and low, front and back, left and right. Between the body and our intentions. Between the sense of freedom and joy, and the sense of security and responsibility. Between where we are and where we might want to be. Joining the actual with the essentially divine. That is the meaning of the word: yoking the present moment with an essential moment, finding union [...] Modestly learning what we sense through the body.’

## Yogic Rewilding:

### Understanding The Different Aspects Of The Practice

Each of the following sections will explore one of the principle aspects of the practice, as I have explored it to date. After an initial introduction to each aspect, I will then consider how that aspect can be translated on to the yoga mat.

#### A Note On The Importance Of The Body

Writers who have looked at yoga in relation to the environmental movement and social activism have tended to focus on the philosophical aspects of yoga. For example the Buddhist yoga teacher and social activist, Michael Stone, whose book, *Yoga for a World Out of Balance*, has been an inspiration to me. His book is essentially a reinterpretation of Patanjali's yoga Sutras for our time, and isn't so concerned with the physical yoga asanas. While understanding that yoga is much more than a physical practice, I believe that the importance of working with the body must not be overlooked either, particularly as modern lifestyles become increasingly sedentary and our range of movements, diminished. Moreover, the body represents 'the ground from which all our knowing of the world begins'.<sup>24</sup> It is for this reason that my primary focus in this study is with the body and yoga asana.

#### 1. Working With The Body In Movement

The way in which the body moves - the quality of her movement - is an important aspect of Yogic Rewilding. Movement is the expression of life.<sup>25</sup> As somatic educator, Liz Koch, writes: 'all living tissue is movement and movement is life [...] the pulse of life must

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<sup>24</sup> Tufnell and Crickmay, *A Widening Field*, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the the Body Moving* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), p.xix.

find a way to express itself or stagnate and die'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as yogis and other movement practitioners understand, it is when we stop moving that our problems begin, on an emotional as well as physical level.<sup>27</sup> Denying the body the expression of movement, which is so fundamental to her being, is yet another way that our connection to the web of life can be severed.

The therapeutic value of movement was understood clearly by the psychiatrist, Peter Levine, who developed the process of Somatic Experiencing.<sup>28</sup> He looked at the freeze response in wild animals and was interested in their ability to move on unscathed and without evidence of having been traumatised, despite the almost continual exposure to near-death experiences that are part of their everyday existence. He saw that their ability to transition relatively easily through trauma was attributable to their being able to effectively discharge the energy that went into holding them immobile - at the point of freeze - during their traumatic encounter with a predator. He witnessed how humans, on the other hand, tended to remain stuck in the state of paralysis - at the point of freeze - following their exposure to trauma. As many therapists and bodywork practitioners readily understand, any prolonged internal retention and stagnation of energy is likely to result in a manifestation of dis-ease on some level, be it physical, mental or emotional; and it can also be argued that trauma is part of the daily fabric of modern day life. With this in mind, I suggest that we explore the body's range of movements as part of an on-going process to prevent the unhealthy accumulation and stagnation of pent-up energy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Koch, p.8 and p.17. See also Hartley, p.4 and pp.25-27. Hartley talks about the importance of movement from the earliest stages of our development in the womb, and she discusses how we first learn through movement. See also Hugh Milne, *The Heart of Listening*, quoted in Tufnell and Crickmay, *A Widening Field*, p.45. Movement is one of the oldest forms of human expression: 'Long, long before we knew how to talk, we knew how to sing. Long before we knew how to sing we knew how to make sounds. Older than sounds we knew how to gesture and before gesture we knew how to posture. All these are our languages, we can speak all four or five.'

<sup>27</sup> Koch, p.13. On an emotional level too, movement and the free-flow of emotional expression is key to our sense of well-being. Koch reminds us that the roots of the word *emotion*, are deeply connected to movement.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Levine with Ann Frederick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Hartley, p.210 and p.262. Hartley talks about the importance, when working with movement as therapy, of not focusing on blockages. Rather she advocates experiencing the blockage and the unblockage, experiencing the flow of energy rather than its stagnation.

The practice of Yogic Rewilding specifically encourages instinctual movement, which is a defining characteristic in the movement of wild animals. This type of movement has played a significant role in the work of the yoga teacher, John Stirk. Stirk was a student of Vanda Scaravelli, and he encourages yoga practitioners to engage with instinctive movement during their practice as a way of accessing the primal ('original') body, which he believes is the source of our wisdom.<sup>30</sup> Stirk understands the important role movement plays in defining the human experience, and he works with the idea of *body as process* to decentralise posture, with which much yoga practice in the West has become preoccupied. The emphasis he places on moving *through* posture, as well as on the transitions into, and out of, posture, will prove important in the practice of Yogic Rewilding. Without reference to the term *rewilding*, I feel that Stirk's approach certainly moves within that realm.

### ***On The Mat: Exploring Passing Through Posture***

When working with Yogic Rewilding on the mat, I want to suggest that we challenge ourselves to move away from the idea of *producing* a posture and instead work with the notion of *passing through posture*.<sup>31</sup> By working with the idea of letting form emerge from within, rather than imposing it on the body, we give due significance back to the process of moving into, and out of, posture. We become less concerned with posture as a destination point, and we ensure that we move within the capabilities of our own bodies, however they are, at any particular time. This ensures that we always move safely. Working in this way means that we become more used to listening to the body, allowing the 'internal righting and orienting system' of the body - that is to say, the inherent wisdom of the body - to assert itself.<sup>32</sup> The body, after all, instinctively seeks balance, which is evident even on the most basic level;

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<sup>30</sup> Stirk, p.xiii. 'Yoga lies beneath all patterns of human conditioning while originality lies beneath all forms of yoga. The yoga masters understood that a framework is needed as a door to the yoga experience and beyond, and that the door itself was not it'.

<sup>31</sup> Stirk, p.65. I am thankful to Stirk for introducing me to the idea of *passing through posture*.

<sup>32</sup> Koch, p.8. Koch believes that cultivating awareness is key to improved movement. Liz Koch is a firm believer in the need to move away from notions of moving in a *right* way, and to focus instead on moving with awareness. She sees the danger in trying to imitate a teacher, in imposing form from the outside, and engaging in meaningless repetitive movement, which simply results in disconnect.

when we observe, for example, how our arms spread and our legs separate to lower our centre of gravity when our balance is compromised. Our bodies instinctively know the forms that are beneficial, and the limits within which it is safe to move. The problem is that we have become so used to disregarding or distrusting her messages.<sup>33</sup> *Passing through posture* is, therefore, about allowing space and freedom for the expression of our body's own wisdom, which will, by extension, bring about the recalibration of the whole. In the words of the poet, Mary Oliver: 'you only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves'.<sup>34</sup>

I suggest that *passing through posture* means beginning any movement towards posture from a stable and balanced position, from which a journey towards the edges of form can then be embarked upon. I suggest that it also means allowing subtle movements to some key areas of the body as a way to awaken the instinctual impulses of the body. The key areas of the body that I have explored to date are listed here below, and are given more comprehensive explanation in Appendix II.<sup>35</sup>

- The hands
- The feet
- The pelvis
- The coccyx (tailbone)
- The shoulder girdle
- The spine
- The head-neck-ear complex
- The jaw
- The skin

By working in this way, we open form up, enlivening the defined edges of posture. Importantly, we make postures personally relevant, hereby reconnecting us to our practice,

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<sup>33</sup> Deane Juhan, *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork*, expanded edn (New York: Barrytown/Station Hill Press, 2003), pp.356-7. Juhan makes the link between the rise in scientific objectivity and our loss of internal awareness, and trust in our body's wisdom.

<sup>34</sup> Oliver, p.14.

<sup>35</sup> In suggesting that we work with key parts of the body, I have been inspired by Koch, pp.63-64. Koch identifies the body's major *righting reflexes* as: bottoms of feet and hands, pelvic sacroiliac ligaments and the head-neck-ear complex.

and cultivating trust in the body's natural ability to find the balance she seeks, which, over time, will gather momentum.

I believe that an over-conscientious adherence to posture in yoga is likely to restrict us in many aspects of life. A softening of form is a softening of identity, and as we loosen our attachment to the rigidity of identity, we can move beyond the limitations by which we have become both defined and confined. I don't believe that the ancient yogis ever intended the imposition of form on to the body to be the point of yoga asana. Such an approach only serves to stifle, deny expression of, and further disconnect us from, our human experience, which the yogis might argue is why we are here in the first place.

It's important to emphasise here that I'm not advocating a complete abandonment of form, in which I believe there is great value.<sup>36</sup> Form, when approached with a certain spirit of enquiry, acts as a container of holding, within which the instinctual body can feel safe to move, and within which the conditions are right for insightful exploration to occur. However, there is something in the dynamic interplay between form and its dissolution that allows the process of rewilding to happen. Yogic Rewilding issues a calling to feel into one's creature-like body in order to experience the reality of our physical presence more fully. It's akin to appreciating the handmade over the mass-produced.<sup>37</sup> Just by allowing the instinctual body to have her say, we are showing our appreciation for the unique way she expresses herself. Just as we marvel at beauty of the brushstrokes of the painter visible in a painting, or the sculptor's fingerprints in a handcrafted clay pot, we send the message to our instinctual body that she is important, and that we are willing to listen.

It can take time to allow the body to adjust to a new way of moving. We've become so used to imposing behaviour and censoring our movements that the softening of form to allow the instinctual body expression is likely to feel unfamiliar and, quite possibly,

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<sup>36</sup> I believe that there is great wisdom in the traditional asanas, which incidentally often took their inspiration from the natural world. I regard Yogic Rewilding as a way of getting to the inspiration and impulse behind the posture, rather than becoming caught at the surface level of the posture. I believe that by working with form through the process of Yogic Rewilding, we can enrich our experience of yoga and expand our movement vocabulary in a way that is beneficial. I believe it can deepen our sense of connection and belonging, which can also be understood in terms of belonging to a yogic lineage. For examples of the rich stories and references to the natural world that underlie the postures, see Zo Newell, *Downward Dogs & Warriors: Wisdom Tales for Modern Yogis* (Honesdale: Himalayan Institute, 2007); Swami Sivananda Radha, *Hatha Yoga: The Hidden Language: Secrets, Symbols, Metaphor* (Boston and Shaftsbury: Shambhala, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Juhan, p.216. On our sense of effort and value, Juhan writes, '[...] it is not flawlessness which imparts this value, but rather the many small imperfections which attest to the difficulties of the task and to the actual efforts of the craftsman.'

uncomfortable. But the unfamiliar is exactly what I want to suggest we should welcome into our experience. We should be seeking to bring attention to our habits, which often become unconscious through familiarity. While some habits may be useful, others will be less so, and it is by breaking those unhelpful habits that we can bring about deep transformation and allow the rebalancing of our systems.<sup>38</sup> In reality, every moment is different from the last and offers a new experience, because we are in a continual state of flux, as is our environment. (More on that later.) It is an illusion that things remain constant and steady. It is an illusion that, for example, our ability to express a posture remains the same, and practising yoga in a way that reinforces this illusion is yet another way of fueling our feelings of disconnection. By letting the unfamiliar in, we slowly come to realise that there is no final destination to reach, because our material is always different; and it is only with this realisation that we gain the ability to recognise which aspects of ourself are there, looking to be re-integrated back into the whole.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Juhan, p.189. Juhan writes, 'The security offered by the 'normal,' the familiar, is so powerful that it typically prevents us from achieving improvements [...] the feeling of normalcy has a great force of inertia.'

<sup>39</sup> Stirk, p.31. I have been inspired by Stirk's expression: 'We can always come across an aspect of ourselves that can reintegrate with the whole.'

## 2. Awakening To Place

Focusing on the movement of the body in relationship to an environment is another important defining aspect of Yogic Rewilding. It's important to remember that, 'yoga is not merely inwardness[...] The environment impinges on us.'<sup>40</sup> This aspect of Yogic Rewilding is what seems to differentiate it most substantially from the approach to yoga explored by Scaravelli and Stirk. Despite Stirk's acknowledgment that 'we are a response to our environment', he tends to treat the body as effectively isolated in space.<sup>41</sup> Yogic Rewilding, conversely, focuses on the dialogue existing between the outside and the inside, whereby the process of shifting between the two brings an enlivening and life-affirming quality that ultimately enriches our experience of both the outside world and our inner world. It is only here, at the dynamic interface between outside and in, that we can truly enter into relationship with our surroundings and understand ourselves to be part of a greater whole. In the words of Krishnamurti:

[...] The outer and the inner are the same movement - they are not separate. The division of this movement as the outer and the inner breeds insensitivity [...]  
Awareness of this whole movement is sensitivity.<sup>42</sup>

And it is sensitivity we should strive to cultivate if we want to take our place in the web of life, sense that we belong, and live in harmony with our surroundings.

Moving inward must, of course, be identified as an important and necessary step in coming into contact with our essential nature, which is, after all, one of the principle aims of

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<sup>40</sup> Feuerstein, 'The Practice of Eco-Yoga', *Yoga Journal*, January-February 1990, pp.77-8 (p.78).

<sup>41</sup> Stirk, p.17.

<sup>42</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, 'Notebook: 28 October 1961', in *On Nature and the Environment* (1991), <<https://krishnamurti-teachings.info/book/on-nature-and-the-environment.html>> [accessed 19 May 2017]. See also Krishnamurti, 'From Darkness to Light', in *On Nature and the Environment*. He writes, 'The division of the outer and inner is the beginning of [wo]l man's conflict and misery.'

yoga.<sup>43</sup> However, it is my belief that making and exploring a relationship with *other* can be an effective precursor to deepening our understandings of the Self.<sup>44</sup> My personal experience of exploring the practice of Yogic Rewilding has revealed its capacity to prepare the body-mind well for internalising and meditative practices, which are the practices through which yogis have always believed it is possible to access the essential Self.

While Stirik's work certainly encourages a deep feeling into one's own body in a way that I would argue is beneficial in today's world of disconnection, I have come to believe that a simultaneous outward movement of reconnecting with what is other than Self, and hereby re-integrating ourselves back into the whole, is an equally important part of deepening our understanding and development of the Self. Yogic Rewilding is a practice that encourages us to enter into a direct relationship with other: it's a process through which we make a connection to what is outside of ourselves, allowing the body to become permeable. Such a process takes us beyond our boundaries of separateness, to a place of realising the oneness of which all of existence forms an integral part. It is here that our sense of disconnection can find some healing.

Physically, or rather sensorily, meeting *place* as we engage with our yoga practice is encouraged in the process of Yogic Rewilding. The sense of place was always important to traditional cultures, yet is something that modern society doesn't seem to value. Instead we see ourselves as living 'on top of nature'.<sup>45</sup> As a practice that asks us to enter into dialogue with the wider environment, Yogic Rewilding encourages a process of meeting and deeply connecting with the idiosyncrasies of place in a way that will assist the environmental cause.

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<sup>43</sup> See 'Prashna Upanishad', in *The Upanishads*, Introduced and translated by Eknath Easwaran, 2nd rev. edn (Tomales: Nilgiri Press, 2007), p.234. 'Those who know the Self, the seat of consciousness, | In whom the breath and all the senses live, | Know all, gentle friend, and live in all'. See also Patanjali, 2: 22, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, As Interpreted by Mukunda Stiles (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2002), p.22. 'Those who know the True Self | have fulfilled life's purpose. | For them, the seen world | ceases to exist.'

<sup>44</sup> Such views are echoed by Feuerstein, *Yoga Journal*, p.78. 'Yoga is not merely inwardness [...] the environment [always] impinges on us'.

<sup>45</sup> Spretnak, p.3. Spretnak in her critique of the modern world, writes, 'the sense of the place was no longer to be important. After all, modern society lives on top of nature [...] Yet the importance of place, both for its subtle influences on the human and for its relevance as an ecosocial frame of reference, is now making itself felt. [...] My main assertion is not that it would be a good idea if we were to pay more attention to body, nature, and place, but rather, that the actual power of body, nature, and place are now asserting themselves and poking large holes through the modern ideologies of denial.' See also p.27, where she highlights the importance of place to traditional cultures.

Place becomes specific and, therefore, personally relevant, meaning that it becomes of interest to us, to consider and minimise the ecological impact of our actions.

We meet and become attentive to the details of place through the sensory body, and particularly the sense of touch, which has been a fundamental aspect of the human experience since our earliest days as a bundle of cells in the womb.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the sense of touch is largely disrespected in modern society.<sup>47</sup> Seeking to reinstate the importance of touch and the intelligence of the skin, the anthropologist, Ashley Montagu, was already in 1971 identifying a tendency towards a decline in the value attributed to them. I would argue that an increasing reliance on technology has continued to minimise opportunities for us to authentically engage the tactile senses. As we are thrust ever deeper into the realms of virtual reality, we become subject to the potentially damaging psychological effects of touch deprivation.<sup>48</sup> Awakening the senses, quite literally, helps us to *make sense* of our world:<sup>49</sup>

For meaning [...] remains rooted in the sensory life of the body - it cannot be completely cut off from the soil of direct, perceptual experience without withering and dying.<sup>50</sup>

Sensory deprivation risks leaving us unable to connect with place, hereby stripping our lives of meaning and causing our mental health to deteriorate. Fortunately, 'Our bodies know

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<sup>46</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, 3rd edn (New York: Harper and Row, 1986). Montague illustrates the extent to which the sensation of touch has been essential in human development and survival.

<sup>47</sup> Juhan, p.275. This is despite the fact that tactile senses are the means through which we perceive the world and organise our bodies in space. As Juhan writes, 'we are at all times literally "feeling our way" through life.'

<sup>48</sup> Juhan, pp.345-347. See also Will Self, 'The Chaos Beneath', *The Guardian*, Review, Saturday 6 August 2016, pp.15-16; available online <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/06/will-self-digital-lives-chaos-box-set>> [accessed 30 May 2017]. Self highlights the fragility of the digital world, whereby virtual reality, once representational, is quick becoming constitutive of reality itself. He wonders what will happen digital connections fail, and predicts mass hysteria as humanity loses a grip on that reality it once believed in. Maintaining our connection to the physical and sensory body takes on a whole new level of importance when viewed in this light.

<sup>49</sup> David Abram, *Spell of Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p.265.

<sup>50</sup> Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, p.80.

that they belong; it is [only] our minds that make our lives so homeless.<sup>51</sup> If we can engage our bodies, therefore, we can reawaken the senses - particularly the sense of touch - and all may not be lost.

## On The Mat: Making Our Connection To Place & An Introduction To The Earthing Practice

Arriving on our mats, really taking in where we are and what is going on for us physically, mentally and emotionally is an important initial step in reconnecting with place, and our feelings in response to place. Giving ourselves time to feel into a specific place, to settle into a position of stability and to feel into the contact we make with the ground, is fundamental in creating the conditions from which engaged and authentic movement can unfold. It's good to remember that, "The state in which you begin work determines the quality of the work found."<sup>52</sup> I am suggesting, therefore, that the practice of Yogic Rewilding begins with a period of settling and listening to what may arise from within.

I consider the semi-supine (or a suitable modification) to be a good place to begin any practice. It's a balanced posture that gives support and inspires trust. In the semi-supine, importantly, the pelvis is stabilised, allowing the body to feel completely held, and it is with that feeling of support that tension and patterns of holding can fall away, allowing awareness to deepen and expand into other parts of the body.<sup>53</sup> I would argue that this is the level of trust required for any therapeutic practice to hold value; for when we know that we are held, we can begin to explore our edges and limitations most effectively.

In taking this time at the beginning of our practice, we create the space and quiet into which the unfolding of engaged movement can occur, and in which the capacity to become alert to our sensory experiences becomes possible:

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<sup>51</sup> John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Hunger to Belong* (Bantam Press: London, 1998), p.4.

<sup>52</sup> Tufnell and Crickmay, *BODY SPACE IMAGE: Notes towards improvisation and performance*, rev. edn (Alton: Dance Books, 1993), p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Koch, p.37. For the importance of moving from the semi-supine position, I am thankful to Liz Koch by whose approach I have been inspired. She terms this position, the CRP or *Constructive Rest Position*. See also p.45. She believes that its ability to stabilise the pelvis is one of the key reasons for its effectiveness. For a more in-depth discussion of the pelvis, see Appendix II.

[...] It's only through great silence that you learn, you observe [...] you must have space and there must be silence [...] And we need space, not only physically, but much more psychologically [...] Silence is something that comes naturally when you are watching, when you are watching without motive, without any kind of demand, just to watch, and see the beauty of a single star in the sky, or to watch a single tree in a field, or to watch your wife or husband, whatever you watch. To watch with a great silence and space. Then in that watching, in that alertness, there is something that is beyond words, beyond all measure.<sup>54</sup>

The breath acts as a bridge connecting us and our internal world with the external world of place. After the settling and quieting of the body, I want to suggest that we then take time to consciously link body and breath.<sup>55</sup> Beginning with a conscious exhalation is regarded as particularly beneficial. It is with the exhaling breath that we can most readily release what we've been holding, hereby preparing ourselves in the best possible way for the start of a new cycle.<sup>56</sup> The exhalation is a process of emptying, which creates the space for us to then be in a position to receive whatever comes. Sensing and permitting the ripple of movement that radiates outwards from the spine towards the periphery as we exhale, can be particularly helpful in enabling the body to make her natural connection, through movement, to the environment.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, spontaneous movements that arise as we breathe can be welcomed as the body's way of softening held tension, and *righting* herself in relation to the whole. In the practice of Yogic Rewilding, our aim is to encourage a constant

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<sup>54</sup> Krishnamurti, 'Ojai, 22 May 1983', in *On Nature and the Environment*.

<sup>55</sup> T. K. V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice*, rev. edn (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1999), pp.18-19. Desikachar wrote, 'Recognising our personal starting point begins with the exploration of the body, including the breath. [...] The first step of our yoga practice is to consciously link breath and body.'

<sup>56</sup> Dennis Lewis, *Free your Breath, Free your Life: How Conscious Breathing can Relieve Stress, Increase Vitality, and Help you Live More Fully*, (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2004), p.5. Learning to exhale fully and to let go are considered key to discovering one's 'own authentic breath'. See also p.26. It is common that we hold our breath before we move, and similarly, it is common that we force or narrow the breath during movement. To fully release with the exhalation, then, sets us up with good habits as we move on.

<sup>57</sup> Scaravelli, p.23. Scaravelli describes this movement, facilitated by the exhaling breath, as 'a wave of expansion originating from the spine'. This movement forms the basis of the Scaravelli method.

dialogue between body and breath, with each supporting the other, rather than trying to fit one inside the other.

By consciously engaging with the breath after the initial period of settling, we can become attuned to the subtle movements that the breath creates in the body, and I want to encourage an expansion of these movements as natural extensions of the breath. It is a process of more deliberately connecting body and breath, and by doing this, we can begin to explore our body's relationship to the specific place we move through. In the practice of Yogic Rewilding, these movements, arising from the breath, are given a proper space in which to unfold constituting a defined practice in its own right. I have called this practice the *Earthing Practice*, and believe that it plays an integral part of Yogic Rewilding.

As well as being a way of introducing movement to the body, I want to suggest that it is also used regularly throughout one's asana practice.<sup>58</sup> This will ensure that we always begin and end every expression of posture from a place of stability and balance. The Earthing Practice can be done from the semi-supine or an equivalent grounded, and grounding, position: from lying, sitting, kneeling or standing as appropriate to the flow of one's chosen asana sequence. I have provided indications to guide the Earthing practice in Appendix III.

The Earthing Practice is essentially a simple, free and improvisational gesture that enables the body to find the support of the ground beneath, and to re-integrate herself into the composition of the landscape to which we belong. It is a practice that can help us to get our heads out of the way and to destabilise the force of our analytical thinking minds. Human development is often seen in terms of moving towards verticality, both physically and mentally. But, as Scaravelli recognised,

We have to get a clear idea not only about the vertical pull and flow of energy, but also about the horizontal line.<sup>59</sup>

As the tendency in society has grown towards prioritising the intellect - associated with the head - we detect a separation in the body between the upward and outward expanding

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<sup>58</sup> I suggest engaging with a short form of the Earthing Practice before and after each asana, and even between sides of asymmetrical postures.

<sup>59</sup> Scaravelli, p.162.

space of the mind and the base physicality of the body, rooted to the Earth through gravitational forces, and usually considered devoid of any kind of intelligence. The Earthing Practice is presented as a means to challenge such a polarisation of the body, to ensure that we maintain our connection to the Earth, from which real wisdom stems, and which quite literally sustains us. To quote Scaravelli again, ‘the function of the body is to collect energy from the ground.’<sup>60</sup> From first making proper contact with the ground, we can rise up with the full up-thrust of an energy that is not blocked by a body held in tension, and the Earthing Practice enables our body to do just that. Let us remember that the ground is the source of nourishment for all living beings on Earth:

For a bird to fly, it must first press down into the Earth [...] rooting to the Earth provides the key impulse to spread our arms and soar.<sup>61</sup>

It is to the Earth (and the Earthing Practice) that we should also return at the end of our asana practice. Only here can the practice of Yogic Rewilding reach a true sense of completion. By returning to a stable, balanced and grounded position, such as the semi-supine, and by spending time there, without expectation and without imposing anything on the body, we allow our bodies time to process, digest and assimilate the experience of our practice as a whole. While believing in the importance of movement to the human experience, to take time to be in relative stillness and quiet, held fully by the support of the ground, is to be embraced as an equally important part of Yogic Rewilding.

The ground’s generosity takes in our compost  
and grows beauty. Try to be more  
like the ground.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Scaravelli, p.33. Scaravelli writes, ‘the function of the body is to collect energy from the ground.’ She believes that contact with the soil will enable us to expand both horizontally and vertically.

<sup>61</sup> Koch, pp.54-57.

<sup>62</sup> Rumi, [untitled], in *Rumi: The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy [sic] and Longing*, trans. with commentary by Coleman Barks, repr. edn (New York: HarperOne, 2005), p.52.

### 3. Re-integrating With The Elemental Weave of the World

Having ascertained the importance of place, it should be understood that place isn't a static concept. The anthropologist, Tim Ingold, who is himself interested in the role played by movement in the evolution of wo|man, draws our attention to the fact that all human movement occurs not within, but *through*, an ever-fluctuating stream of atmospheric movement. In short, we are creatures of movement - 'human becomings' in Ingold's words - and we live *through* an environment that is similarly characterised by movement.<sup>63</sup> Another key aspect of Yogic Rewilding here reveals itself: Yogic Rewilding is a practice that encourages an expression of movement that is deeply enmeshed in the greater patterns of movement that run through the world.

The teachings of Tantra reveal that such ideas were already understood by the ancient yogis. Forming the basis of their theory of creation and evolution is the idea that all matter in the universe, including wo|man his or herself, is a composition of many Elements, or *Tattwa*, in Sanskrit.<sup>64</sup> Although there are 36 Elements | Tattwa in total, the material universe is said to comprise of five, known collectively as the Five Great Elements or the *Pancha Mahabhuta* (*Bhuta* being a synonym for Tattwa). These five Elements are: Earth, Water, Fire, Air (or Wind) and Space. According to yogic science and philosophy, everything in existence can be shown to comprise of these five Elements in varying proportions and in ever-shifting relationship to one another.<sup>65</sup> They can be described as 'the building blocks that make up our physical world'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, in reality, they are not literally the physical or chemical *stuff* of the universe. They are best conceived of as energetic vibrations from which the

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<sup>63</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) p.9.

<sup>64</sup> Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Tattwa Shuddhi*, 2nd edn (Munger: Yoga Publications Trust, 2006). Satyasangananda discusses the theory of the *Tattwa* in more depth as an introduction to the Tantric meditation practice of *Tattwa Shuddhi*, through which the Elements of which we are all comprised are purified. Also useful in providing an introduction to the *Tattwa*, see Swami Nischalananda Saraswati, *Insight Into Reality: The Tantric Teachings of the Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* (Llandeilo: Mandala Yoga Ashram, 2012), pp.176-182 and pp.413-440.

<sup>65</sup> Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies: A Comprehensive Guide to the Ancient Healing of India* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998; repr. London: Piatkus, 1999), pp.8-11.

<sup>66</sup> Sebastian Pole, *A Pukka Life: Finding Your Path to Perfect Health* (London: Quadrille Publishing, 2011), p. 13.

material world manifests.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, they might be more appropriately called the ‘Five Great States of Material Existence’.<sup>68</sup>

Each Element embodies certain qualities that give texture to our world. Yet, the theory of the Elements allows us to understand that all expressions of life ultimately come from the same source; that is to say that we ultimately come from oneness.<sup>69</sup> We are, therefore, part of the landscape from which we readily perceive ourselves to be separate. What appears to be *out there* is actually also deeply imbedded within us; and what we perceive to exist within us, is part of a much greater whole.<sup>70</sup> Working with, or through, the Five Great Elements, as the the practice of Yogic Rewilding encourages, will integrate us into the dynamic interplay of Elemental forces that gives coherence to the world. It’s a way of threading ourselves back into the Elemental weave of the world, and importantly, of keeping ourselves vital.<sup>71</sup>

## On The Mat: Exploring The Elements

The Elements provide a rich source of inspiration for exploring yoga asana. Some asana may relate quite directly to one or more particular Element, whereas we can also use the Elements to focus on specific details of moving through a posture. To take Marjari-asana | Cat Stretch Pose as an example: the Element Water may inspire us to focus on the fluidity of the spine; the Element Air may encourage us to explore different patterns of breath as we

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<sup>67</sup> Swami Nischalananda Saraswati, p.433.

<sup>68</sup> Dr. Robert E. Svoboda, *Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution*, 1st rev. edn (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), p.14.

<sup>69</sup> Easwaran, pp.225-237. The Elements are described as the powers that support the body. They are essentially manifestations of the overseeing oneness of *prana* | life force, which becomes separated firstly into the five senses, which are the means through which we perceive the world, and then the Elements that give structure to the world. See also pp.233-4. Only in deep sleep do we return to that place of unification with oneness: ‘When the mind is stilled in dreamless sleep, | It brings rest and repose to the body. | Just as birds fly to the tree for rest, | All things in life find their rest in the Self. | [...] all things in life | Find their rest in the Self in dreamless sleep.’

<sup>70</sup> Svoboda, p.14. ‘Everything which exists in the external universe has its counterpart in a living being’s own personal universe’.

<sup>71</sup> Koch, p.10. Koch writes, ‘Working with rather than against the Earth’s perpetual motion keeps us vital.’

move through the posture; the Element Earth may prompt us to spend time feeling into the different contact points our body makes with the ground. In Appendix IV I have collated my research into the various qualities of the Elements, which can be used as a reference to guide an exploration of the asanas. Indications for working with several individual asanas are then given in Appendix V, with the reminder that the instructions given are not intended to be prescriptive, but merely to provide an example of what the practice of Yogic Rewilding could look like.

Elements can also be explored as themes, to determine the asana we chose to practice and their sequencing alongside other postures. In order to provide an example of this, I have created possible sequences, reproduced in Appendix VI, each of which explores one of the five Elements. Of course, the sequencing options are quite possibly endless! When sequencing, we may choose to focus on one particular Element, as I have done, or we can opt to integrate more than one Element into a single asana practice. I believe that as our explorations and awareness deepen, we will learn to be able to vary our emphasis for therapeutic purposes. I believe that, with consistent practice, we will develop the capacity to recognise when we are out of balance, and we will be able to work with the Elements accordingly to re-establish our sense of balance.

# Yogic Rewilding: The Story Is Just Beginning

## A Summary Of The Principle Aspects Of Yogic Rewilding

It is perhaps timely here to briefly summarise the principle aspects of Yogic Rewilding as I envision the practice:

- We encourage instinctual movements in our practice, to awaken the body's natural righting reflexes.
- We explore the idea of passing through posture, moving away from the idea of perfection and embracing the process of journeying, without a final destination in mind.
- As an extension of the point given above, we give significance to how we move into, and out of, posture.
- We constantly seek to challenge our postural and practice habits, in an embrace of the unfamiliar, to shift patterns and welcome in new insights.
- We seek to engage the senses, particularly the sense of touch, through which we make contact with the world, and through which we become sensitive to our own needs, and the needs of others, including the Earth.
- We take time at the start and end of our practice, ideally in the semi-supine, to feel into our environment, and to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings that arise in us. We strive to accept whatever comes in each particular moment, knowing that they are an inextricable part of the bigger landscape of our world.
- We take time to make a connection between body and breath before we move our body.

- We begin by consciously encouraging a full exhalation, in order to release whatever we have been holding on to up until now, and so that we can be completely ready to receive what comes next.
- We allow our first movements to be inspired by the breath, and to be extensions of the subtle movements naturally generated by the breath. This enables movement to emerge from within, rather than being something that is imposed on the body.
- We allow our first experience of the movement inspired by the breath to expand and develop into the Earthing Practice. This practice is essentially our way of reorienting ourselves to the landscape and placing ourselves in a position to move on with greater clarity and confidence.
- We return regularly to the Earthing Practice throughout our asana session.
- We always end our asana session with the Earthing Practice and with a gradual fading away of movement into relative stillness and quietness so that our experiences can be processed.
- We allow the qualities of the Elements to inform our practice - the qualities of our movements and the sequencing of the asanas we choose to work with.
- We strive to remain attentive to the details of our experiences, with the aim of getting to know our bodies and ourselves better, and aiming to deepen our understanding of the Elemental qualities that run through ourselves and the world and to eventually help us to identify and rectify imbalances and dissonances.

The practice of Yogic Rewilding is essentially about bringing ourselves back into balance, and back into balance with our surroundings. It involves awakening the senses and taking time to feel into our bodies and the space they inhabit in the world. It's a practice that enables us to see that our perception of separateness is but an illusion; that we are actually

part of a wider, infinitely expanding, web of interconnections.<sup>72</sup> It's a practice that takes us beyond our contracted point of view, hereby bridging the divide between wo|man and the natural world, from which so much disease and illness stems, and through which the belief in wom|man's superiority over the natural world has taken hold. It is my belief that by engaging in the practice of Yogic Rewilding, we can heal our sense of disconnection and re-integrate ourselves back into the web of life; and in doing so, we cannot help but live more lightly and more sustainably, as our thoughts are constantly being led back to the whole from which we all come.

The way of moving encouraged by Yogic Rewilding demands that we pay attention. The practice requires that we become attentive to the details of our interaction with the world, and as such, it's a practice that serves to cultivate the qualities of the Witness | *Sakshi*, which has, incidentally, always been a principle intention of yoga.<sup>73</sup> The practice of Yogic Rewilding encourages us to become immersed in a continuum of deeply conscious moments, and in that process, we begin to tell our story. It's a story that plots our unique experience of being in the world, and a story which it is imperative that we tell. In these times of disconnection, the weaving of our fragmented experiences into a narrative gives a coherence and meaning to our lives that we so desperately need. Our physical and mental well-being depends on it: 'Without expression, our sense of self shrinks and contracts.'<sup>74</sup> The poet, Ted Hughes goes even further to say, 'In fact, you could not live if you were not continually making up little stories.'<sup>75</sup> Here emerges then yet another reason to explain why practices such as Yogic Rewilding matter.

Yogic Rewilding is a practice that consciously opens up the dialogue between Self and the world, enabling us to tell our own stories while simultaneously weaving our own

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<sup>72</sup> Stone, p.1 and p.15.

<sup>73</sup> Patanjali, *Sutras*, pp.2-3, I: 2-4. The importance of developing the qualities of the Witness are highlighted by appearing in the opening verses of the Sutras: 'Yoga | is experienced | in that mind | which has | ceased | to identify itself | with its | vacillating waves of perception. | When this happens, | then the Seer is revealed, | resting in its own essential nature, | and one realises the True | Self | At all other times, | the Self | appears | to assume the form | of thought's | vacillations | and the True Self | is | lost.'

<sup>74</sup> Tufnell and Crickmay, *A Widening Field*, p.42.

<sup>75</sup> Ted Hughes, from *Poetry in the Making*, quoted in Tufnell and Crickmay, *A Widening Field*, p.175. See also p.x. The authors discuss the creative process as a healing process, powerful and empowering because it doesn't require the mediation of a therapist to interpret material. See also Hartley, p.301. Here Hartley reminds us that all genuine healing ultimately comes from within. The creative forming and expression of personal stories, therefore, holds great potential as a tool for healing.

stories into the greater narrative of the whole. It is here that great hope for socio-ecological change lies. Through the creative process of storytelling, fresh perspectives, new insights and the possibility for creative solutions to global problems can arise: '[...] For let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.'<sup>76</sup> Through creative storytelling, we can re-envision, and over time, re-define the image of the world we want to create.

Until each of us for ourselves reopens the book, the text, the scripture of the body to the presence and attentiveness of the mind, there will continue to be many answers and many solutions that will refuse to appear.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Amitav Ghosh, 'In The Eye of the Storm', *The Guardian*, Review, Saturday 29 October 2016, retrieved from <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/28/amitav-ghosh-where-is-the-fiction-about-climate-change->> [accessed 30 May 2017].

<sup>77</sup> Juhan, p.358.

## Towards a Conclusion

In this study I ultimately hope to have inspired a reconnection to the natural world and its patterns of movement through a closer identification with the details of whatever environment we find ourselves moving through, at any specific moment in time. Although our lives are naturally aligned with those patterns, we tend to lose awareness of them as they become buried beneath the 24/7 rhythm we are compelled to impose. Living in a way that is detached from the natural world, as so many of us now do, has been identified as a source of great dis-ease and suffering, and I have presented the practice of Yogic Rewilding as a means of re-integrating ourselves back into wholeness, hereby initiating a process of personal healing. Furthermore, as we, as individuals, find our way back into balance, it has been understood that balance will naturally be restored to the ecosystem as a whole. In this way, Yogic Rewilding has emerged as a practice of real socio-ecological significance, and a framing of yoga that is relevant for our times.

It is through movement (fundamental to all of life and one of the oldest forms of human expression), instinctual movement (arising from the natural intelligence of the body), and specifically instinctual movement in relationship to place, that Yogic Rewilding works as a process of reconnection. By working with the body, and engaging the deep sensory body, Yogic Rewilding provides a very practical response to environmentalist George Monbiot's urgent call for the 'reinvolverment' of wo|man in nature.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it is my proposition that the environmental movement could benefit from this practice as an alternative form of social expression and activism: it has the potential to imbue it with a spiritual dimension often lacking.<sup>79</sup>

Moving in relationship to the Five Great Elements | *Pancha Mahabhuta* has been presented as a central aspect in the practice of Yogic Rewilding as presented in this study. They provide a model for understanding the world and appreciating the common ground that all expressions of life share, and the dynamic web of interrelations into which we are all

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<sup>78</sup> Monbiot, p.11.

<sup>79</sup> Spretnak, pp.221-223. Spretnak presents humanity in the modern era as undergoing an 'identity crisis', describing wo | man as 'homeless in the cosmos'. In defining what a more hopeful vision of the world would look like, one to 'counter the modern ideological flight from body, nature and place', she suggests 'it would be a grounded, deeply ecological, and *spiritual* postmodernism.' My own italics added for emphasis.

woven. As such, they offer us a way of exploring and reconnecting with the time-place we move through, and constitute a system for identifying and rectifying personal (and therefore wider spanning) imbalances. Working with the Elements, therefore, helps us to re-establish our sense of belonging, heal any sense of disconnection and separateness, and hereby dispelling the myth that perpetuates unsustainable ways of living.

The Earthing Practice has emerged as a key feature of Yogic Rewilding. It encourages us to connect with the Earth Element and is a particularly grounding practice through which we can readily make our connection to a specific place at almost any time. It cultivates a deep trust in the stability and support that is right there, beneath our feet, and from which the fullest exploration and expression of our human experience can occur. I have come to believe that the transformative and healing capacity of Yogic Rewilding is made possible to a large extent because of the Earthing Practice, of which the final settling of the body into that position of constructive rest - the space where all the elements of our practice come together into coherence - is a fundamental part.

Yogic Rewilding has also emerged as a creative act. It is a specific approach to movement that encourages us to journey beneath the surface layer of posture, dissolving the rigidity of form that often defines our Western understanding of yoga. Yogic Rewilding respects the fact that we are in a state of constant reemergence, and that we move through an environment that is in a state of constant flux. Yogic Rewilding asks us to pay close attention to the details of our world in any given time-place, and as we move, we become involved in a creative process of storytelling, which is the process through which we can make sense of our world. By providing the space for the weaving of our experiences into narratives, things are put into perspective as we are encouraged to see ourselves as a single ingredient in the whole. Encountering the world from different perspectives, and in relationship to the bigger picture, we find ourselves in a place from which creativity can flow and new solutions to an unsustainable way of living can be dreamed up.

There are many more avenues I would like to explore in relation to the practice of Yogic Rewilding. As my experience of working through the Elements has deepened, I have

already begun to investigate: sound and mantra<sup>80</sup>; the chakras, particularly mooladhara and the practice of moola bandha;<sup>81</sup> as well as pranayama, relaxation, mudra and meditation practices. My research into these areas features in Appendices VII, VIII, IX, X respectively. I would also like to explore further the Elemental sequences proposed by Uma Dinsmore-Tuli in her book, *Yoni Shakti*, and which I have included in Appendix XI for reference.<sup>82</sup>

As a final note, I will re-iterate my belief that Yogic Rewilding constitutes a framing of yoga that is deeply relevant for our times. I hope it has become clear that ecological awareness cannot be divorced from yoga, and the changing state of the world demands a constant reevaluation and re-envisioning of yoga relevant for the times.<sup>83</sup> I consider Yogic Rewilding to be a living form of yoga, and the truth is that ‘living forms are never totally contained’.<sup>84</sup> So for all that has been presented here, I must also re-iterate that my intention has only been to provide some inspiration to encourage practitioners to reconnect with the world we live, so that ultimately we can learn to live here in harmony with our surroundings. Indications for practices, therefore, should only read as suggestions to guide one’s personal exploration. As a process in a continual state of unfolding, it will always defy the limits of language and avoid being pinned down and neatly bound by definition or instruction. So

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<sup>80</sup> Koch, p.74. She believes that fluid-evoking sounds may play a role in activating bio-intelligence. See also Hartley, p.190. Hartley talks about the importance of sound and toning in awakening the organs of the body, hereby allowing the organs to express their energy in a healthy way. See also Lewis, p.108. He explains how vocalisation techniques strengthen the diaphragm, which in turn has a huge impact on the quality of our breath and, consequently, the quality of our movements. See Appendices IV and XI for suggestions of sounds to explore. See also the chant taken from the Isha Upanishad and reproduced immediately after this conclusion and before the Appendices begin. It is one I have enjoyed chanting (with the palms up-turned or held at the heart centre) as a daily sadhana to remind myself, time and time again, that we all come from oneness, and will ultimately return to oneness.

<sup>81</sup> I am also interested in the coccygeal body and its relation to mooladhara chakra. See Hartley, p.214. See also Appendix IV for suggestions of how the chakras relate to each of the Elements.

<sup>82</sup> Uma Dinsmore-Tuli, *Yoni Shakti: A Woman’s Guide to Power and Freedom Through Yoga and Tantra* (London: YogaWords Ltd, 2014), pp.180-201.

<sup>83</sup> Stone, p.94. Stone describes yoga not as a system that should have the last word, but as ‘an attempt to build a platform upon which we can build a thoughtful and coherent response to our current individual, collective and ecological problems’. See also Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension of Yoga*, p.211. He believes that it is longer feasible to pursue ‘quietistic goals’, and as quoted on p.2 of this study, he believes it is time for the ‘necessary convergence between yogic spirituality and social activism focusing on ecological concerns’.

<sup>84</sup> Tufnell and Crickmay, *BODY SPACE IMAGE*, p.198.

there can never be a real conclusion... Thankfully, perhaps, for 'if you come to some kind of conclusion, some opinion you think is right, and hold on to that, then naturally you will never learn'.<sup>85</sup>

The principle message is to take time to make contact with the Earth, to keep moving, to stay curious, and to cultivate awareness of what you experience as you go. Keep delving deeper, getting lost, following even tiny intimations of instinctual movement. Don't be afraid to meet the world, to feel it in your bones, to travel through this time-place and let your story unfold. Be attentive to the details and, soon enough, the deeper intelligence of your body-mind will reawaken and your deep Self will rewild and find its way home. My invitation to you is to embrace this one life as a journey of reconnection to nature:

The relationship you develop will feed you at your core with the joy of knowing that you really do *belong* here.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Krishnamurti, 'Letters to the Schools, Volume 2, 15 November 1983', in *On Nature and the Environment*.

<sup>86</sup> Stowe, p.13.