

Choosing Healing is the Ultimate Warrior Action

ORIGIN COLUMNIST
Ana Forrest



This is a process. It takes time. Every time we disarm a trigger by activating our feet, regulating our breathing, relaxing our neck, and connecting to our core, the power of the trigger weakens.

Devastating injuries can happen in an instant. Choosing healing continues for a lifetime. In November, I will be traveling to Tampa, Florida, to do a benefit class for the Exalted Warrior Foundation (www.exaltedwarrior.com), a nonprofit organization expressly created to bring yoga to the wounded while they are still in the hospital, as early on in their healing as possible. The Exalted Warrior Foundation provides adaptive yoga instruction to wounded warriors from across the wound spectrum, both seen and unseen injuries, in military and veterans' hospital facilities nationwide. These warriors are brave, strong, and work incredibly hard for their own healing. A limb or a piece of skull may be missing, but the warrior's heart and Spirit are alive and aching to connect.

While in Tampa, I am excited to have the great privilege of meeting and working with some of the wounded warriors at Haley VA hospital. These men and women have severe injuries, including amputations, spinal-cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Forrest Yoga does not require strength or flexibility; it only requires a willingness to learn how to feel authentically and respond honestly. I developed Forrest Yoga while working through my own injuries from years of physical and sexual abuse and injuries I incurred while training horses for years.

I teach students to use Forrest Yoga to find and clear the emotional and mental blocks that create and limit their lives, and to choose freedom instead.

For example, PTSD sufferers experience extreme stress reactions. One aspect of this behavior is when a car backfires and the person hits the ground as though they are under attack. I teach them how to retrain their extreme reaction so that they can befriend and regulate their response into being alert, thus repatterning away from their trauma and into their present reality. Breathing and active feet are key.

The first Forrest Yoga basic move I teach is active feet. This is especially important for people with PTSD because when in fear, or when triggered, they lose touch with being grounded and lose a sense of their strength. They get thrown off balance, literally. Knowing how to activate their feet helps them to reground and reconnect to the strength of their legs and to the present situation.

Another major principal of Forrest Yoga is deep breathing. As soon as the triggered person registers that they are triggered — that they

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have gone into extreme stress reaction -- their next step, after active feet, is to regulate their breathing, which then regulates and destresses the brain and entire nervous system within minutes. A steady nervous system is important to repatterning the PTSD response, so what registers is a backfiring car rather than an artillery attack or an IED detonation.

A third vitally important Forrest Yoga move is relaxing the neck. This has a profound effect on the entire nervous system and brain. When a PTSD sufferer is triggered, their neck, jaw, and brain get very tight. As soon as they can relax their neck, they are able to move out of that highly adrenalized crisis mode into a relaxed, alert intelligence.

Connecting to the core and strengthening the core are also crucial elements to healing PTSD. These are two separate actions. Just having sixpack abs is not what I am talking about here. When you get shocked, you lose visceral connection to your core. Reconnecting feeling and breathing into your core is part of disarming the trigger. There are Forrest Yoga poses specifically designed for strengthening the core and massaging the kidneys and adrenal glands, all of which get overstressed and shocked with PTSD.

Another important aspect of Forrest Yoga is building intelligence through feeling the connections between one body part and another. I call this synaptic bridging. Synaptic bridging helps the brain make more intelligent mind-body connections. This means a healthy person will have a much quicker, balanced response, and thus be able to assess a situation accurately to make a command decision. An injured person can build a new neurological pathway from the brain to the injured body part, reestablishing healthy function.

The healing process needs to encompass injuries to the emotions, mind, and Spirit as well. Those with PTSD frequently suffer from shame. When the soldier hits the ground because a car backfired, she feels ashamed by this aberrant behavior. Part of this healing process through Forrest Yoga is moving the shame out. We must recognize and honor that these very same responses are what kept that soldier alive. Befriending that internal response is important, to recognize it and transform it into something more useful. This will allow the soldier to respond in an authentic and appropriate way to whatever life experiences are happening in the present, instead of overreacting with a hyper-response.

This is a process. It takes time. Every time we disarm a trigger by activating our feet, regulating our breathing, relaxing our neck, and connecting to our core, the power of the trigger weakens. These moves give the soldier victory over PTSD. Facing any of our triggers is a big challenge. Learning to disarm our triggers helps us to step into our extraordinary selves and grow our wisdom.

Our wounded warriors embrace tools that bring them to healing. Teaching someone how to befriend a body that is broken into bits and engulfed in physical and psychological pain is powerful medicine. A core principal of Forrest Yoga is to actively choose life — to nourish and cherish our precious life and live in a way that we are proud of. This is crucial to our warriors and every human being on the planet.



ANA FORREST

Ana Forrest has been changing people's lives for nearly 40 years. She is an internationally recognized pioneer in yoga and emotional healing. With thousands of licensed practitioners around the world, Forrest Yoga is renowned as an intensely physical, internally focused practice. With her meticulous guidance, Ana's students cultivate an acute awareness of their own practice and life process, resulting in an exhilarating journey into self-discovery, cleansing, and healing. Ana's new book *Fierce Medicine: Breakthrough Practices to Heal the Body and Ignite the Spirit* (HarperOne, May 2011) is available wherever books are sold.

To learn more about Ana, Forrest Yoga, and *Fierce Medicine* visit www.forrestyoga.com.