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Exercising Your Caring Heart

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Recently, I had the privilege of working with the [Exalted Warrior Foundation](#) to bring yoga to wounded veterans at Haley VA Hospital. I would love to inspire everyone to give back in their own way by sharing my experience and ideas for adapting yoga for people with big challenges. This work is for anyone with a caring heart who wants to make a difference. Maybe you will choose to share the gift of yoga as well!

What drew me to working with people's trauma was having worked my own way through trauma and realized that there is a way out of these hells. When I am looking at someone that has got a brain injury, or is crippled, or has a spine injury, I can look back into my own life and the hideous experiences that I survived have new meaning, when I apply

what I learned to help another. Healing my wounds has become part of my wisdom, part of my polished treasures that I have to offer.

Whether working with someone with big physical challenges like brain injuries or paralysis, or someone who is getting older and restricted or a person who spends most of their life as a desk jockey: Everyone has their gates, their resistances, their challenges, their despair points, and they can come through them in a heroic way. To be able to nurture these triumphs is really exciting for me.

I encourage everyone to volunteer and share the gifts they have to offer. If you want to teach yoga, then find someone who needs more attention, who can't come to a regular class because they have a spinal cord injury, or they get migraines, or they have depression or are a senior. Volunteer your time. Reach out and encourage these individuals to do yoga. It will help them feel better in their body, and enrich their quality of life.

There are also great people out there already doing this work, like the Exalted Warrior Foundation. Seek them out in your community and volunteer with their group. Or go to a local hospital or senior center and ask what you need to do to get a yoga class started. You may need to audition or do some extra training, which means you get to learn something in this experience -- how great is that! Stay alert enough to learn something more every class you teach. I highly recommend that you team up and make allies with caregivers, family members and facility staff for your students with unusual needs because the student's team needs the support, and they could use the breathing and yoga also. Healing is a collaborative effort that encompasses

everyone -- you, your student, and their whole team. If the team does yoga and learns to breathe deeply while touching the person who needs extra care, everyone will benefit.

Practice using your healing hands on your student or loved one in a supportive way to help them open, move pain, and to hold them safely in a pose. Inhale into your heart. On exhale, send the energy from your heart through your hands, communicating your caring and compassion through touch. Next step, put your hands where the pain is or where the injury was, and coach your student to breathe into that spot while you breathe deeply also. Use your hands as a guide to teach them to bring fresh breath and energy to the injury so it can strengthen and heal. Then, with your energy reach in there and connect to the person's spirit, even if their brain can't directly interact with you. Get over your fearfulness of touching someone who has been hurt; reach out and help them! Get this: Just reaching to them is helpful.

If touch is too scary for them for now, touch them energetically with your voice. Respect the boundaries of "don't touch me" if they set a boundary, because that is empowering to them. Cue them to breathe deeply with you, get them to watch you as you do the motion that you want them to do, and they can follow.

When you go in and work with people who have had trauma, be very alert to what your definition of success means, such as thinking they are supposed to respond in a certain way. Can you put your concept of success on the shelf and find out the truth of what's actually happening? You may not realize that your presence is planting some seeds that will sprout at a later time. Be willing to plant those seeds without necessarily getting to see them grow. Did your person take a

deep breath? That is a win. Each step is worth celebrating and is part of the mystery and magic of healing.

Be vigilant about nourishing yourself with your breath and your own practice in this challenging work so your energy is vibrant. You need to go in there juiced because your energy has to be big enough to affect the person you're working with, the caretakers and the family members. Engage with the whole team to help pick the energy up around your student. Get everybody breathing deeply. This kind of yoga is not just you in a pretty little yoga center teaching people to say "Namaste." It's a bigger, more challenging world out there and it's great to make a difference.

When we exercise our desire to help, touching another person's heart and soul, that grows and delights our spirit. Discover in your own life how delicious it is to share your gifts with the world.