

# **hunger, hope + healing:**

**a yoga approach to reclaiming your relationship to your body and food**



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- There is methodology for a yoga-based recovery, including the stages of recovery from self-nurturing discipline to self-empathy to self-forgiveness, along with the essential life skills of yoga.
  - Getting in the GAP
  - Getting Comfortable Feeling Uncomfortable
  - Moving from Love not Shame
  - Personal Buoyancy..
- Yoga is far more than downward facing dog pose or deep breathing. There are brain-sensitive reasons to choose how we approach recovery through yoga.
- And tools to support how our presence as a therapist can be enhanced by our own practice of yoga.
- Sarahjoy will outline the neuroscience behind yoga and the therapeutic alliance yoga can help us to cultivate with our clients and recovery community.

## Learning Objectives:

1. Participant will understand the relevance of the poly vagal theory to all therapeutic relationships and will integrate 2 personal tools to use in session with clients for their self-regulation.
2. Participant will be able to discuss the difference between diaphragmatic breathing and secondary breathing and its effect on the brain and physiology. Additionally, they will be able to facilitate a neurological shift for their clients by training them in accessible, trauma-sensitive diaphragmatic breathing techniques.
3. Participant will be able to facilitate mindfulness and breathing practice to cue Getting in the GAP, and Getting Comfortable Feeling Uncomfortable for their clients.
4. Participant will be able to outline the three stages of recovery.

# The Triune Brain

- Reptilian Brain: Autonomic Nervous System
  - Regulates breathing, heart rate, body temperature
  - As for infants: Arousal, Sleep/Wake, Hunger/Satiation, Breathing, Chemical Balance (Van der Kolk)
- Mammalian Brain: Limbic Brain
  - Map of relationship between organism and surroundings, emotional relevance, categorization, and perception (Van der Kolk)
  - Interprets incoming information to determine threat
  - Amygdala “smoke detector” (Van der Kolk)
- Neo-cortex: Wise Mind
  - Planning and anticipation, sense of time and context, inhibition of inappropriate actions, empathetic understanding (Van der Kolk)
  - “Watchtower” (Van der Kolk)

# Brain Pathways for Sensory Input

- Sensory Input from environment to Thalamus
- Processed and sent to Amygdala – interpretation
- LOW ROAD: If perceived threat, amygdala (with feedback from hippocampus) messages brain stem and Hypothalamus to secrete hormones
  - HPA, heart rate, blood pressure, changes in respiration, ANS
- HIGH ROAD: thalamus to hippocampus and anterior cingulate, to prefrontal cortex: more conscious interpretation
  - Modulating messages from medial prefrontal cortex

# Polyvagal Theory

Stephen Porges's theory is the sequential evolution of three separate autonomic subsystems, all of which have been conserved in social mammals to serve different purposes:

**Dorsal Vagal Parasympathetic, Sympathetic, and Ventral Vagal Parasympathetic.**

## What is the Vagus Nerve?

- One of the longest cranial nerves, **Vagus** originates from Latin, meaning 'wandering'.
- The vagus nerve connects brainstem to the body, from which the brain receives, controls and monitors several body functions automatically. It links heart, lungs, and gut to the brain-base.
- This type of ancient circuit connection is common in birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians.
- Myelinated and Unmyelinated Nerves

# Functions of Vagus Nerve

## **HEART**

Cardiac regulation, heart rate, blood pressure

## **LUNGS**

Respiratory regulation

## **MIDDLE EAR**

Extracting human voices from background noises

## **PHARYNX AND LARYNX**

Speaking and swallowing

## **ESOPHAGUS, STOMACH, INTESTINES**

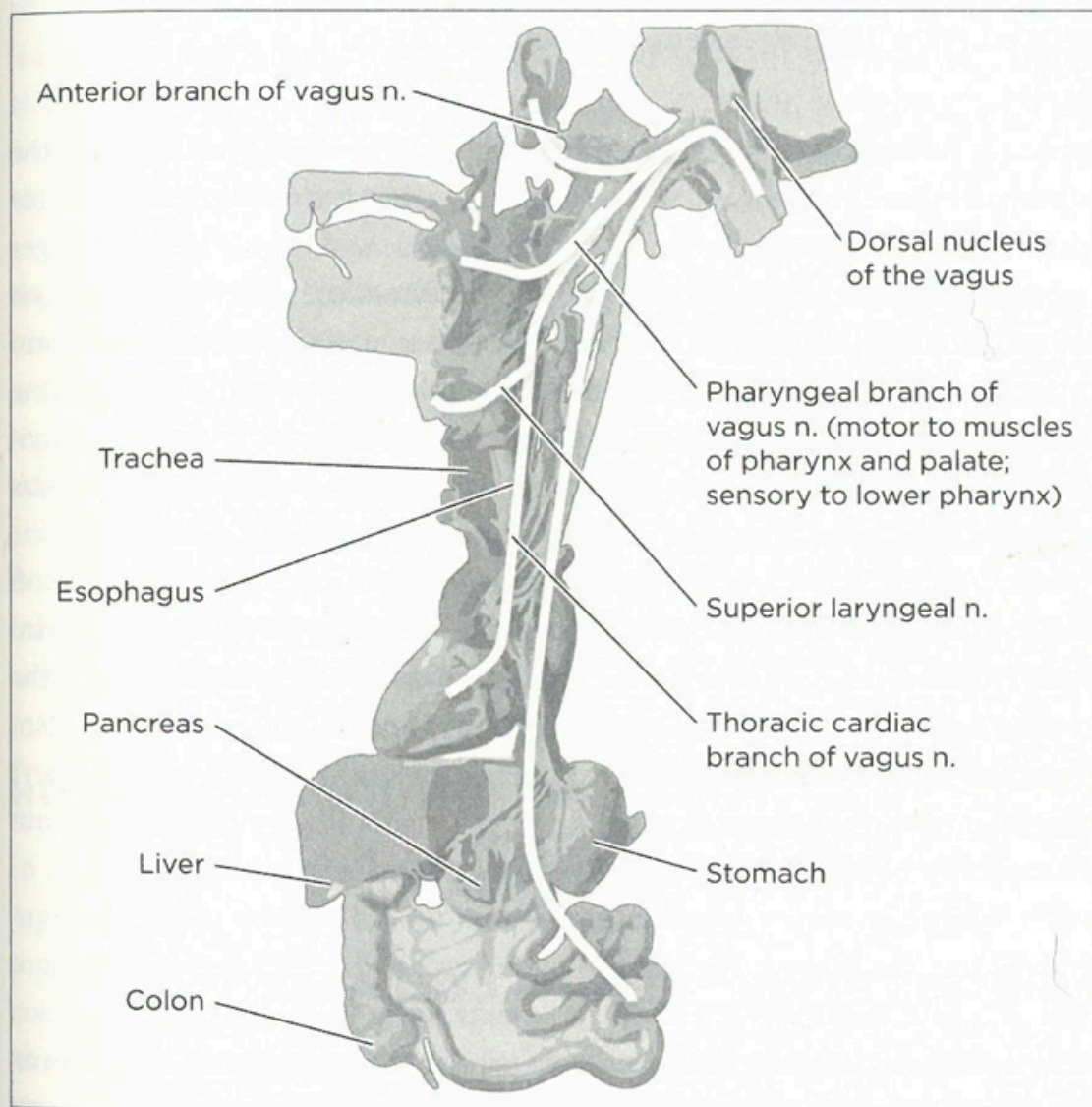
Feelings of hunger and fullness, swallowing and digestion, Motility/peristalsis

## **KIDNEY, GALL BLADDER, PANCREAS, LIVER**

*Adapted from Porges (2003a & b)*

Some main functions include:

- Breathing
- Speech
- Sweating
- Keeping larynx open
- Monitoring and regulating heartbeat
- Informing the brain of food that is ingested + food that has been digested
- Empties the gastric region of food
- Damage causes gastroparesis: losing the muscular function in the stomach and intestines.



**The many-branched vagus.** The vagus nerve (which Darwin called the pneumogastric nerve) registers heartbreak and gut-wrenching feelings. When a person becomes upset, the throat gets dry, the voice becomes tense, the heart speeds up, and respiration becomes rapid and shallow.



# Polyvagal Theory + YOGA

<p>Homeostasis Ventral Vagal Parasympathetic Nervous System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• optimal heart rate, respiration</li> <li>• calming</li> <li>• supports healthy respiration + digestion</li> <li>• Facial expression in service of social and emotional communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good long term and interpersonal decisions</li> <li>• Emotional attunement, enhanced caretaking</li> <li>• <b>YOGA Considerations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-to-self: increased self-attunement, enhanced self-nurturance</li> <li>• then self-to-other: interpersonal respect</li> <li>• innate connection to compassion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Mobilization Sympathetic Nervous System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>fight-flight</b></li> <li>• Increased heart rate, respiration</li> <li>• Elevated cortisol, HPA, adrenaline</li> <li>• Suppressed digestive, endocrine, immune function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions biased toward survival</li> <li>• Compulsive, self-harming, addictive</li> <li>• Instinct to soothe (even via numbing)</li> <li>• <b>YOGA Considerations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• striving, demanding, or over-efforting</li> <li>• irritability, distractibility, reactivity to environmental stimuli, impulsivity,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Dissociative Dorsal Vagal Parasympathetic Nervous System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>freeze-submit</b></li> <li>• bodily shutdown</li> <li>• immobilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• isolation, socially withdrawal, shut down</li> <li>• <b>YOGA Considerations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lower vagal tone correlates with inability to take in new information, self-care challenges, depression, sleep difficulties</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Breathing is Key to Health

**Fight:** conflict within self or with another, pitta's fiery criticism to self or other, inner shame voice, intolerance

**Flight:** escape hatch, dissociating, self-abandoning, fleeing the "other"

chest muscles to prepare for fight, lift of rib cage, upper trapezius, levator scapula, scalenes, and pectoralis minor, incomplete exhales

**Freeze:** stunned, freeze self or other out, high speed vacillation without relief. Held abdominal tension.

**Submit:** collapse in the face of stress, give up on self, deep lethargy

Suppression of diaphragm, tightening of abdomen, sips of air with chest breathing, incomplete exhales

**Befriending:** warm regard, kind appreciation, self-acceptance, self-compassion

**Homecoming:** coming into your body, your mind, your heart as a place of solace and refuge.

**Melting:** easing the belly, softening to your own vulnerability

Diaphragmatic breathing with inhale to the lower belly, exhaling from the lower belly

**Inflating:**

Reawakening courage, commitment, and capacity

Thoraco-diaphragmatic breathing, inhale begins with diaphragm and includes the thorax

# Fight become Befriending:

- Warmly welcoming experiences as they are without judgment or creating a story
- Acceptance of what is happening in the here and now, as it is
- Positive regard for self experiencing the human condition, with its vulnerabilities + joys

**Breathing Practice: Befriending**

# Flight becomes Homecoming

- Coming back home to the body, in the here and now.
- Re-connecting to the tangible evidence of the present moment.
- Inhabiting the body, not self-abandoning

**Breathing Practice: Homecoming**

# Freeze becomes Melting

- Melting the history and habit of tension
- Releasing the 'freeze' of the diaphragm
- Melting shoulder blades, facial muscles, tongue, and instinct for guarding

**Breathing Practice: Melting**

# Submit reaction becomes Inflating

- Re-inflate capacity, courage, and commitment
- Full torso breathing, thoraco-diaphragmatic breathing
- Expanding back into the heart.

**Breathing Practice: Inflating**

# Top-down + Bottom –up Processing

## Breathing with mantras

### Befriending:

I warmly accept [myself, this present moment, my feelings].

### Homecoming:

I am kindly willing to stay in my body.

I don't need to self-abandon.

My body can be a place of refuge.

I am a source of solace for myself.

### Melting:

I welcome this residue (and all others) to flow downstream.

Melting brings me back to my inner resources.

### Inflating:

Facing this moment with courage helps me overcome [     ].

My needs matter.

# **Yoga as a template for learning the Four Essential life skills:**

- **Getting in the GAP**
- **Getting Comfortable Feeling Uncomfortable**
- **Moving from Love not Shame**
- **Personal Buoyancy**



# Getting in the GAP

- Getting Grounded
- Paying Attention
- Becoming Present
  - Using neutral, tangible, sensory data to develop concentration
  - Tethering the mind to this One Thing
  - Non-judgmentally
    - Slowing down the hyper-vigilance
    - Soothing the amygdala
    - Top-Down Bottom-Up Processing: Quiets Limbic Brain, Soothes Reptilian Brain

# Getting Comfortable Feeling Uncomfortable

- Acknowledging discomfort as a normal event in the human spectrum, worthy of our respect and attention
- Respecting sensation as information, developing curiosity instead of reactivity
- Understanding early life relationships to physiology
- Welcoming the discomfort of not doing the familiar thing; tolerating this long enough to feel urges rise and pass
- Welcoming the discomfort of joy and poignancy
  - Recovery provides opportunities for joy, sorrow, preciousness, and elation; we practice GCFU for all arising experiences, not just those that we immediately identify as “uncomfortable”

# Moving From Love Not Shame

- Understanding origins of internalized shame
  - Disrupts our ability to grow and evolve physiologically, neurologically, and spiritually, as we battle with defense mechanisms biased toward surviving rather than thriving
- Shifting lenses
- Ending the isolation
  - Recognizing how shame pervades our culture and media
  - Identifying the language of shame and responding with empathy
  - Reaching out: social engagement vs withdrawal + isolation
- Inner voice tone and language choices
- Body-centered shame vs body intelligence
- Tethering yourself to love
- **Attunement Network:** trusted support people, practitioners on your team, members of your therapy group

# Personal Buoyancy

- Personal buoyancy as vagal tone, resilience, genetic as well as the result of protective mechanisms in relationship to risk factors
- The Body Dashboard
- Yoga and Buoyancy: “righting” the brain, nourishing the nervous system, tending the heart, creating community

# **Down-regulating and Up-regulating with Pranayama and Mindfulness**

## **Down-regulating:**

Going to the Bones/Connecting to the Ground: Mindfulness Tool

Melting: Breathing Practice

Lengthened Exhale: Breathing Practice

## **Up-regulating:**

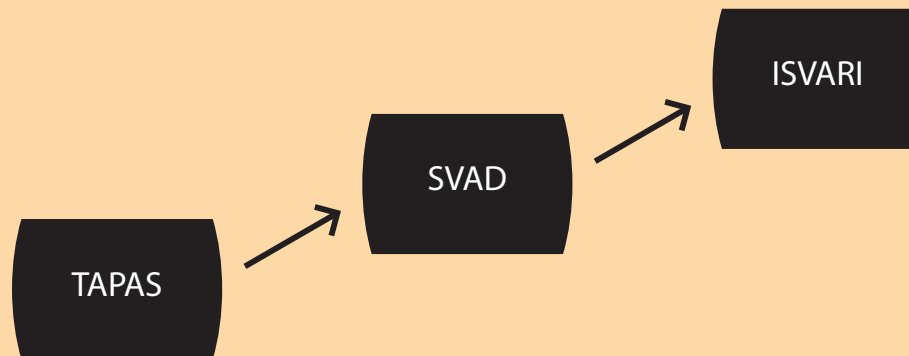
Sound and the space in which sound exists: Mindfulness Tool

Pressure Chamber Breathing: Breathing Practice

Arm Swings: Breathing Practice

# The Stages of Yoga for Recovery

the stages of yoga



HEALTHFUL

tapas: self-nuturing discipline

svadhyaya: self-study, self-empathy

isvari-pranidhana: surrender, freedom and forgiveness

# **Stage One: self-nurturing discipline (tapas)**

- Discipline as self-nurturance not as punishment, deprivation, restriction
- Self-nurturance implies an over-arching attitude to nurture one's vitality
- A more clear Brain and Body State:
  - to work toward more clear brain function and, thus, more clear thinking
  - to discover and create a new relationship to discipline
  - Temporarily restrain the tumult of the voices of shame involved in ruthless self-examination and/or to titrate brain and mind capacity towards self-reflection when not under the influence of self-harming behaviors.

## **Stage Two: self-empathy + self-study (svadhyaya)**

- Capacity to self-reflect while developing self-empathy as a foundation for reflection
  - Not asking “what’s wrong with me?” “why do I keep doing this?” or questions with an attitude of self-recrimination or shame.
- Understanding our human condition
  - Developing self-compassion in light of our personal history, our human condition, and our vulnerabilities + strengths in the processes of change
- Finding Faith and Reviving Courage
  - Becoming someone you can count on
  - Non self-abandoning
  - GCFU to support the courage and fortitude needed for the journey



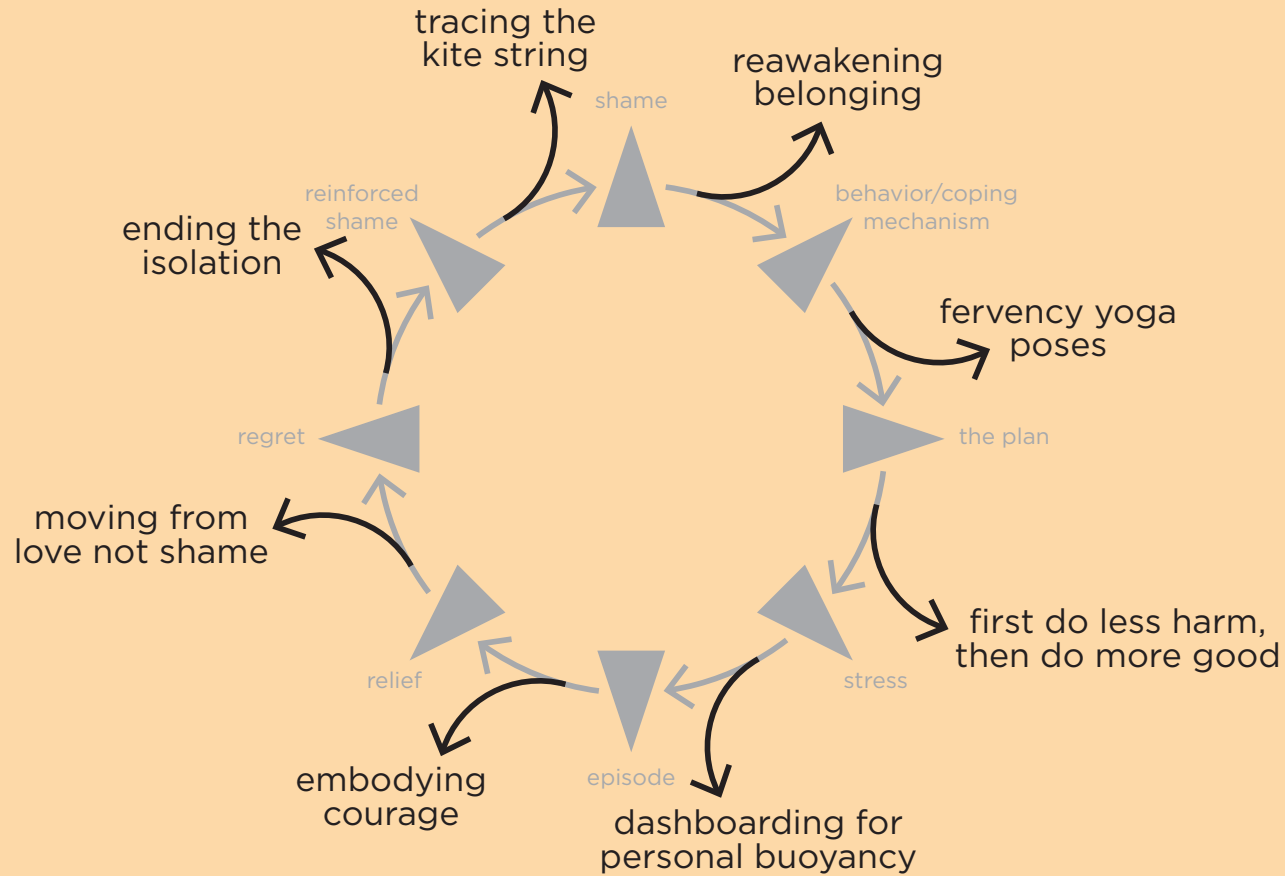
## Stage Three: forgiveness + freedom (isvari-pranidhana)

- Forgiving ourselves for pain we've been in or caused ourselves
- Surrendering who we think we've had to be or become
- Hindsight, Present Sight, Foresight
  - Learning from our history, recent + long-term
  - Body dashboard blips on the radar screen
  - Looking at the horizon + choosing wise action
- First Do Less Harm, Then Do More Good
  - Do the slightly less harmful thing
  - Uncouple a behavior complex by a few degrees
  - Let go of black + white, all or nothing thinking
  - Maintain the self-care that you can (shower, supplements)
  - Encourage the possibility of 'doing more good'

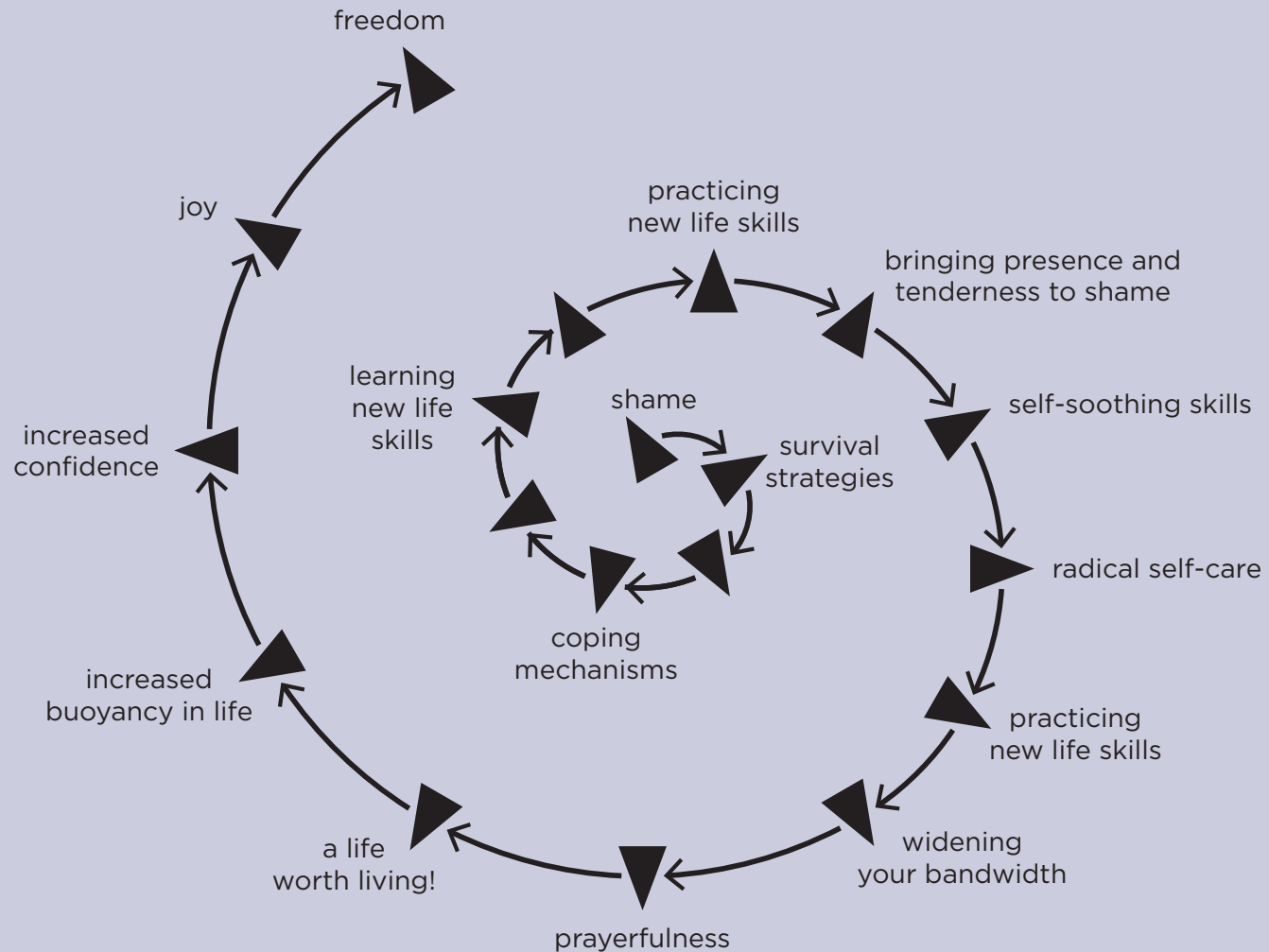
# Cycle of Addiction



# Cycle of Freedom



# Cycle of Recovery



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Yoga Therapy Professional Training approved of  
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