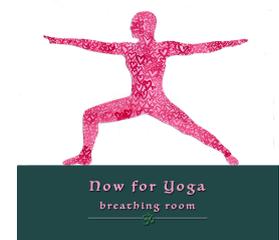


Chanting the Cultural Divide

I've had experience crossing the cultural divide, diving into another culture and way of life, as an exchange student to France when I was 17. As new language comes in, so too does a different way of thinking., small things, like in French, the lost property box' is actually called the 'found items box'... 'to realise' in English is to understand something on an intellectual / thought level, whereas in French, 'réaliser' means to make something come about in the physical world. So we begin to see a different view of the world..... to embrace other perspectives. In Australia we live in a melting pot of culture, and cultural exchange has been more readily accessible to my kids than it was to me, through learning a different language at primary school, through the immediacy of the internet, and thanks to the fast air highways, with planes crisscrossing in all directions, reaching out to new cultural destinations.



Yoga has given me another chance to cross the cultural divide, learning the names of poses in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, as well as the story and cultural significance behind these names. Learning Yoga tools for health and wellbeing has been heart-opening and supportive, and in the beginning was also a stretch from my Australian, western upbringing. Singing foreign words to open the heart, and clear the mind? What?!

The beloved Yoga tool of Kirtan, yoga singing, is a way to connect inwards, and was an unexpected gift of studying Yoga teacher training, just over 10 years ago now.

For me, there has always been singing. From my first cassette tape of Kylie Minogue singing « Je ne sais pas pourquoi », to « Stayin Alive » tabletop, disco dancing at Dance Night in high school, there has always been a real sense of whole-hearted devotion, where the act of singing saw tears well in these eyes, much to the amusement of my siblings.

Dancing has been a way to connect to music, as I could respond to the rhythm in a way that made some people say 'wow you're a great dancer!' Just like I responded happily to that kind of attention, things weren't so rosy for the singing side of things, where hitting the 'right note' didn't come as effortlessly as dancing. Somewhere in the mix of life embedded the external message « I can't sing ». And then Yoga came along and said: « it doesn't matter whether you think you can sing or not, just sing, at the top of your lungs....» and an invitation to enjoy singing came my way once more! How liberating! Sing and immerse yourself in the melody, in the words., even if in the beginning you don't know what the words mean, the vibration and frequency of the words are infused with uplifting intention.

My first experience of chanting was with Jugadambe, Jai Ma, Jai Ma! I remember commenting to my Yoga teacher that all the /J/ sounds were pleasant to my ear. later on I learnt that Jai Ma means Victory to the Mother? Which mother? My mother? Your mother? Me as mother? Oh, Divine Mother, Mother Earth, Universal Mother in the form of Durga, warrior mother of inner strength, Lakshmi, beloved mother of abundance, Saraswati, mother of wisdom and compassion and Kali, Mother of courage, slayer of fear.

Through this singing Yoga tool-for-life, I have a regular and enjoyable practice, guiding my concentration and meditation, peace and bliss. May my practice benefit all beings. May others feel unconditional love blossoming in their hearts, just like I did when I bridged the cultural divide with mantra Yoga singing.