



## 16. CELIA ROBERTS

Celia Roberts is an accredited and experienced yoga and meditation teacher, with a degree in Biomedical science, majoring in anatomy and physiology. She has taught yoga both nationally and internationally in America, Canada and Japan. As an Ayurvedic practitioner, with a Masters in Psychosomatic therapy, Celia offers you a broad range of experience and knowledge in retreats, classes and private consultations.

Celia's knowledge in both western medical science, and eastern Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine combine to give you a holistic framework for natural healing.

Celia Roberts has enthusiastically practised yoga and meditation for the last 12 years, and she uses her deep kinesthetic awareness and heightened sensitivity developed through these practices to assist others. Celia Roberts has taught yoga & meditation for the past 7 years and has formally trained with respected yoga teacher, Kate Pell.

She has also been inspired by other highly experienced yoga teachers such as Donna Farhi, Sue Scott, Mother Maya, Swami Niramalanda, Judith Lasater, Clive Sheridan, Leanne Davis, and physiotherapist Simon Borg Olivier.

In the field of Ayurveda, Celia has trained over a 3 year period under the highly competent Dr Ajit at Australasian Institute of Ayurvedic Studies, and also encompasses the timeless teachings of Mother Maya in her work.

In the early stages of her interest in meditation, Celia devoted her time primarily to Vipassana Buddhist meditation. She later learned and practised the basic tenets of Hindu meditation in her studies of Yoga and Ayurveda. As her understanding for meditation and its benefits grew, Celia chose to devote at least 40 days of each year to silent meditation retreat both at home and abroad. Celia is currently under the guidance of renowned meditation teachers Linda Clair and Roger Voorhoeve, amongst others. Continuing her studies in the Theravedic Buddhist tradition, Celia will spend one month in silent meditation with 87 year old monk Sayadaw U Pandita at Saddhama monastery in Burma 2012-2013.

As a holistic practitioner she offers yoga & meditation, Ayurvedic consultation & bodywork. She also offers private counselling, nutritional and lifestyle advice, and private yoga therapy.

Celia Roberts, with the support of Leanne Davis, will be offering a 12 month Yoga Teacher Training programme for the first time in February 2013 in accordance with Yoga Australia guidelines.

Celia has helped many people from different backgrounds and professions to bring health, stillness, and purpose into their lives. In her own life, she daily cultivates the values of mindfulness, compassion, and simplicity.

All retreats and consultations are held at her simply stated farmhouse home, set amongst the beautiful acreage of Upper Brookfield, where you can be truly still in nature.

***Q: Can you please tell me about how you became a yoga teacher?***

C: My sister died suddenly when I was just 18. She took her own life and at that early age I was forced into questioning the meaning of my own

existence and the reality of impermanence. I wondered where she had gone and what had happened to her after her death.

I started to see psychologists, healers and psychics to help me overcome the shock and the grief, and to have some of my questions answered.

I was also suffering from my own levels of anxiety prior to her death, and the anxiety was completely exacerbated by this experience of loss.

Having always had a strong interest in health and well being, I was working in the health sector at the time, meeting some odd and interesting people. There was this amazing woman I met suffering from Multiple Sclerosis. She had given up a very successful, powerful corporate lifestyle, and a marriage. She told me that I was lucky to have a realisation so young and she sent me in the direction of an usual local yogi.

Although I thought this yogi was very strange at the time, I have so much more respect for him now. I remember thinking yoga as a practice was very strange, but I also recognised that I felt very peaceful afterwards. I would go to his small house/ashram and he would speak instructions on gentle asanas (poses) whilst his eyes were half open, as if they were rolled back in his head. He never moved from cross legged position whilst teaching, and whilst he did look unusual to me at the time, I now recognise that he was in a deep state of Samadhi. It was all by donation if I recall correctly.

A couple of years later, I was studying a form of healing under a great teacher who had eliminated a lot of my own personal fears and grief. He was encouraging about practising yoga daily, so I continued to take classes everyday at the University where I was studying.

My interest in complementary health and healing had grown so much that I was now interested in becoming a practitioner of some kind to help others alleviate their suffering. However, I was age 22 and I felt I was too young and unwise at this age to see people personally.

Then one day the obvious solution appeared. I was practising yoga and meditation daily, with a selfish love for the practice. I enrolled in a teacher training programme without a firm decision as to whether I was doing it to teach, or just for my own personal practice.

The formal year long intensive training course was one of the best years of my life. During that year, someone suggested that I start teaching, and by that time I felt that I had been given so much by my teachers, that I truly wanted to share the depth of yoga and what had been given so freely to me.

With a small baby in arms, I could also see how yoga teaching was a perfect way to combine a family life and way of living. I also felt that perhaps teaching children could work well, as I wanted to try and protect my own child and others from mental instabilities.

After a move to Japan, I then started my first year of formal teaching. I taught community Mother and Baby classes, corporate & studio style, and community adult education classes. It was perfect. I studied yoga daily and personally practiced for up to 4 hours per day whilst my daughter would be asleep in our small Japanese apartment.

When we moved back to Australia, I set up a small studio that housed about 6 local people in our home. From there it grew, and I now run a retreat on a acreage in Brisbane, Australia. I continue to study yoga, and will do this continually in every moment possible. It has been a path for me that has provided meaning, depth, and freedom. I hope to be able to always share this path sincerely with others.

***Q: What are your views, feelings, beliefs on charging for these teachings of yoga and meditation or the dharma and how do you do this with your students?***

C: When I first started teaching, I really felt that the teachings should all be free for community service, and partially because I lacked confidence in my own ability. I was very young, and perhaps a little unwise.

So when I started teaching In Japan, I set up many weekly community yoga classes in community centres. These were classes that were not-for-profit, which was also the expectation of the community centres. I was teaching for a small donation from those attending. This fed, clothed, and housed myself and my daughter in a small apartment in rural Japan.

I also had some corporate and studio classes that brought an income that I saved for the future, so that when we moved back home, I had a small amount of money to set up a little studio room in our home.

When in Australia, I started to charge standard rates for small group yoga classes based on other classes in our area. I saw this as living money, whilst my daughter was at kindergarten. Classes did start to get busier, and

money flow became good. I spent all excess money on my education in the field. Little else.

I have always been good with money and able to save. My Mother taught me this.

There were now many students practicing yoga daily in our home, and street parking had become problematic. With the money I had, I felt strongly to set up a retreat centre, and finally the day came where this was possible. A small miracle really.

I have always seen money as an energetic flow and I have no problem with having money as long as it is used well and to serve others generously.

My feeling is to use it wisely to spread the messages of yoga and meditation. Over the years, donating extra money to various causes has been a great way of keeping the flow of giving alive. My Burmese teacher Sayadaw U Pandita was great on the topic of generosity: "Give freely, and fear not". The generosity at his monastery in Burma was palpable, as was his compassion. This affected me greatly.

Another very good friend of mine who is involved in yoga speaks of the abundance that is available to us all. I agree with this wholeheartedly, and if I can share that as a teaching and a service, I would be very happy.

I have looked into others ways I can serve the community without financial gain and personal desire and I will always continue to do so. Where students are unable to afford the services of yoga, we have often arranged

bartering or reduced fees according to their needs. I really feel that yoga is a practice that should be available to all, and will spend my future years (with the help of others) making it more and more freely available to all people.

***Q: What are your views on charging for meditation and do you see a distinction with this and yoga?***

C: Whilst traditionally yoga and meditation are not separate as described by Patanjali's 8 Limbs of Yoga, it seems in the Westernization of yoga they have become quite distinct. When you are teaching to a wider audience, you do need to differentiate between the label of "Yoga" and "Meditation" for ease of understanding in the public.

When I chose to separate the two for this reason, I did think about offering meditation without fees, as I understand that the Dharma (truth) should be free. It had always been given to me in this way in the Buddhist traditions. However, I did have teachers who were not Buddhists, and did not live in a monastery from donations (dana), so I chose to follow their example in the early days. So when I set up meditation, I charged a small fee per class.

Currently, with a much stronger interest in meditation than expected, I have now set up 10 week terms, as many people prefer to commit to a term as they can see the benefits of regular practice. This is the same with yoga asana classes.

When I set up the terms and retreats I decided to donate 10 percent to the Burmese monasteries where I was going to study. This had a wonderful

flow to it, and people would actually give me money on top of class fees to donate to the monastery.

Just recently, I have looked into running a charitable organisation, as my Father does this. He advised me against it initially, as I teach mainly on my own as this stage. His advice was the same as many: to continue to give a percentage of income to causes that I felt were meaningful, and in line with yoga and meditation.

To continue the flow of dana and giving, I have set up community yoga & meditation by donation programmes in the parks, called “Grass Roots Yoga”.

When asked to speak at corporate functions to encourage people to live mindfully and compassionately, I do not request payment.

From the money I do gather from paid classes, I always put it back into servicing people in a better and more expansive way.

Currently I am gathering any funds available to me to build a larger retreat space on our acreage farm for people for people to come, stay and find what they need in the form of Meditation, Yoga, Ayurveda and Mindful Living.

***Q: What about Dana and a lay person practicing this. Do you think that would be understood?***

C: Possibly not. I always explain 'dana' in Western terms. For example, the website may say that 10 percent of all profit is donated to this Buddhist Monastery, and I include the link to where it is being donated, so the public can trust that fully.

I have been inspired by reading about a for-profit yoga centre that runs some low cost community classes and volunteering in Sydney, Australia.

The spirit of giving was truly alive in that centre because of the generosity students received. People donated their time, effort, and gifts regularly to keep it alive. It seems that if the spirit of generosity is alive and well in a person, place or organisation, then people feel that, and wish to be part of that interaction.

On a more heartfelt level I try often to create this generous spirit through "metta" practice with students. This is the Buddhist loving kindness meditation to all beings, regardless of our past hurts or grievances. This is a practice I used from a very young age to heal grief and a false sense of separation, and I feel this is incredibly important to spiritual practice.

I have often felt that one can donate perfectly from the heart. It is easy to wish someone kindness, wish them well. Compassion can help our hearts feel true dana, true giving, and eliminate greed, fear and desire. This reminds us of our deep inherent wisdom; oneness with all.

***Q: What are your views of teaching meditation as a lay person and outside of a Zen Chan, Theravada lineage and tradition without oversight of some kind?***

Yes, I would say that it can be hard at times as a lay teacher as there is no formality. There are no rules or guidelines to adhere to as in strict monastic lineages. This can be challenging, as those rules have been developed for millennia with very good reason. In light of this, you must always try to remain ethical and honest, with some strong personal guidelines.

Encouragement from teachers who you trust is also important. When I was training in the Burmese monastery, my teacher mentioned that I would be able to help others well through insight meditation. That was very helpful for me to hear, and gave me the strength and courage to keep going without the formal oversight. Other teachers whom I respect dearly have given me similar encouragement over the years, both in the yogic and Buddhist traditions, and their precious words have always remained close to my heart.

I also feel supported by many lay teachers who I connect with weekly, who have had much experience and insight themselves. These various teachers are from the yogic traditions, or have studied in Zen Chan, Theravada, or have practiced with other lay teachers themselves.

Connecting with the monastic traditions regularly is also very important to me. This helps me to understand the roots of meditation practice and also to understand people from all traditions and backgrounds. I regularly meet with Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns, Theravadic Buddhist monks, and visiting Hindu Swamis for advice and good counsel. I may sometimes go to local ashrams & monasteries to meditate and receive support and guidance from the community. This is very valuable practice to me, as I respect the deep commitment, wisdom and dedication of monastic life.

Most importantly, I do try and have others come and teach here to encourage the practice of meditation. It is always good for people to hear it

from a few sources. They may be my mentors, teachers, or wise people who I feel have something of value to share.

***Q: Also what are your views on teachers that charge exorbitant fees for being in their presence such as a satsang of some kind? Not giving meditation or yoga instructions but just talking just about their experiences?***

To be honest, I have never been involved with this particular style of teaching, so I truly am in no place to comment. I suppose it may be useful to some, and not to others. I personally need a path, a discipline, valid solid instruction.

I have always trusted that even disillusioned “bad” teachers can be “good” teachers in the end. We see what we need to see in others, and this can be a personal reflection of how to adjust our own practice, and how to move forward. If we are deeply committed to the truth, the dharma, then we will find our way.

I suppose on a personal level, I have seen in myself at times the possibility of losing one’s way. Talking to wise people who have travelled the traditional paths before me has been immensely helpful. You also really have to keep that method of self-enquiry alive, challenging all your motivations for what you do. It can be hard at times, as we do need a little acknowledgement and respect for what we offer, otherwise we would not keep going. Without the students to respect the teaching, there would be no teaching.

Spirituality is so tricky because we all have so many hidden beliefs in the mind that it can be hard to decipher the truth, “the dharma” at times. As a teacher, if you expound some personal deluded beliefs, and have people who believe this delusion, you are obviously creating karma. Or there may be elements of truth and insight to your teachings, but if you start to feel overly empowered by others as a teacher and enjoy this, then you become attached. That attachment may be in the form of money, accolades, followers, or just a new sense of “self” as a spiritual teacher, and again creates karma and suffering.

I personally have a deep respect for the ancient traditional teachings. They have wonderful guidelines and have been around for thousands of years, with strengths in formal lineages, documented paths and scriptures, and true respect for those who have walked the path carefully before us. I have also found that a reverence for the traditions reminds us not to stray from our true purpose in the modern world.

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