

Trauma Release Exercises (TRE) heals and restores balance to your physical and spiritual bodies.

It was Winter 2017 that Gloria and I learned of a TRE workshop to be held at our favorite Charleston yoga studio, Mission Yoga. Mission's owner, Kelly Jean, told us she was excited for the workshop because the modality is said to trigger an autonomic function of the body's nervous system that literally shakes out stored trauma and stress related pain. And since she also one of my all-time favorite yoga teachers, my interest was seriously piqued.

The workshop came at the right time. Synchronous, they say. Over the last three years I'd become aware that my body was getting tighter despite maintaining a power focused yoga practice. Apparently the emotional and physical stress that comes with guiding people down life-threatening white water was not well balanced by cannabis-saturated sun salutations and arm balances. About the same time I opened up to the possibility that my mindset was directly linked to general body health, specifically to flexibility and recovery. This led to research into yin side of yoga, including experimenting with deep relaxation and muscle control techniques. I began reading research that claimed stress is stored in the body, unless of course you release it.

Glo and I agreed, we needed to plan a visit for the workshop. Being my impatient (or efficient) self, I began researching TRE before we were even back in Conway and got the feeling that TRE would be an invaluable tool for healing.

Ok, so what is TRE?

The founder of TRE for All, David Berceli, developed TRE from his experiences working in war zones. He noticed when the bombs began dropping, the children all dropped to the ground as their body succumbed to intense tremors—their muscular system shaking all over. Berceli also noticed that the adults were largely immune from this effect. He then connected the children's behavior to animals observed in the wild: Animals that survive a near-death experience will often go to a quiet place, lay down, and begin to tremor. Next, he realized that the human adults must be consciously and/or unconsciously preventing the shaking. He surmised that, during their development from adolescence, they must have been influenced to stop any body shaking. Likely because shaking is often seen as a weakness. I think we can all agree with this early hypothesis. After all, we're supposed to be tough and independent individuals that rise and fall on our own merits in a system where only the fittest survive, no? Feeling he was onto something, Berceli developed a series of exercises designed to encourage the body to engage

Yogadelic Learning

the autonomic nervous system's natural tremor release, which he has branded as Trauma Release Exercises.

How it works:

First-timers are taught to moderately engage the core, psoas, and legs with the intention to stress the body with a few dynamic but mostly isometric stretches. Key themes are verbalized throughout the workshop introduction: grounding and a sense of security with heavy emphasis on relaxing and acceptance. This is my body. This is natural. This is healing. This is my body's natural healing process, and so forth. After the final butterfly stretch, the body is ready to begin the shaking; all that's left is for you to relax, shake, and rest for about ten minutes before standing up and continuing your day.

My first experience:

My legs shook left and right (about 2-3 inches of movement) and afterwards I felt a tremendous release of energy followed by a serene and calm sense of Self. I'd never experienced anything like it before. My gut told me this was what I've been looking for.

How long does it take? We spent around twenty minutes centering ourselves and stretching/engaging the body. First-timers are encouraged to follow the prescribe routine but once you familiarize yourself with the process you can let your body tell you how to warm up. Shaking times are greatly dependent on your own body. It is advised to shake only so long as you *feel* it is *good*, and up to 15 minutes a session. The instructor said a strong practice is two or three shakes a week.

Where it gets really interesting is where and when the body shakes. The most repeated phrase is that the body knows what you are trying to do and will ease you into the process. This means that people shake differently. How stressed you are, how much stress you got stored, how relaxed you are, and how willing you are to accept the process, all determine the intensity of the shakes.

For the first five months my body only shook in the legs and mostly just quads and calves. I felt calm afterward and always got a brief but beautiful feeling of release deep inside my head. These early shake sessions were often between 7-15 minutes in length and though I wanted to see my entire body shake like a rag doll, it was clear my body knew better and was going to take its sweet time. I practiced 1-3 times a week for those first five or six months. At some point, I realized that if I split a ten minute shake into two five minute sessions then the second session was overall deeper felt than the single ten minute. Next, I had the feeling to shake a little bit every day till my body told me to take a break. This lasted about seven days at which point my

Yogadelic Learning

neck started to tremor—and that my friends led to a very good feeling deep inside my head brain. The next progression was shaking in the right arm and usually in the second session of the day. That brought a very, very good feeling in my head. Then my waist, psoas, and sacrum areas started to shake. Then my shoulders and left arm. Then my chest. It was like an Hollywood exorcism, or when you see someone fake as seizure. And afterward I'd bath in an ecstatic afterglow of the most amazing release of space in my brain and body.

I learned in grade school that survival was predicated on strangling the impulse to cry. By the time my whole body released into the tremors, it had been literally a decade or more that I can recall crying. I certainly never cried at a movie. But one night I had a deep shake and sat down to watch Dolly Parton's **Heartstrings** tv show with my wife. And before I knew what was happening I was crying. Soon after we watched To-go, again after a shake sesh, and damn did I cry at the end with To-go was getting old and living happily ever after. I take this as an incredibly sign of the healing potential of therapeutic tremoring. I was convinced that it was impossible for me to cry. Yet, I was thankfully proven wrong, and certainly it was thanks to TRE.

But what all is really going on?

Your body, sometimes at the behest of your subconscious mind, perceives an event as stressful or traumatic and reacts by storing the stress as toxins and knotting up the muscle/fascia. But your body also knows how to shake that stuff out, except cultural images of expected behavior interrupt the process. TRE reawakens the process. But because we haven't been shaking out the stress, lots of stress has built up. And the more tightness we have, aka the more stored stress, the less open our bodies are. The less efficient our bodies work. The harder it becomes to release emotion. The harder it is to cry. The greater likelihood we lose our temper.

it's like a balloon filled with water; the more water, the more likely the balloon will pop.

Shaking also repairs physical injuries by stimulating recovery from the inside where the body knows best. Research suggests that old injuries can keep patterns of stress "alive" in the body that inhibit full recovery if the body has not been allowed to heal.

So...

When we shake, we are quite literally tearing up all the micro knots and whatnot that have built up which also releases the toxins. Drinking lots of water will help flush them all out.

When we shake, we become intimately familiar with our bodies and that increased feeling translates to a greater awareness of Self which strengthens the body and spirit connection. I'm now able to notice how my neck tightens with every sip of caffeine—increased muscular tension

Yogadelic Learning

is said to be a side effect of caffeine—and I promise you I never noticed that prior to therapeutic trembling.

When we shake, it means that one has relaxed the grip on Self-image. Therefore, the increased familiarity and comfort within one's body that is gained by intentional TRE practice also increases mindfulness. You have to be non-judgmentally aware in order for the mechanism to fully engage. In other words, mindfulness is required to practice and mindfulness is strengthened by the practice.

There is ample research on the modality with more occurring every year. I recommend the book "Shake it off Naturally" if you want to dive deep into the research and practice.

There's also a bunch of fascinating research into muscular and fascia tightness and how they correlate with a person's voice—constricting the vocal cords and/or influencing a person's ability to control their voice which affects the emotional content of the voice. See work by Juan Carlos Garaizabal Jorge for more on that.

A couple tips

Don't shake before a strenuous activity. You will be extra loose and risk a body misalignment. I knew this, but strenuous is relative so it was only a matter of time before I found my personal boundaries. One day I shook in the early morning and after an afternoon nap I went into the garden to harvest a patch of lamb's quarters. We wanted to replace this particular patch with sweet potatoes so I yanked them out roots and all. Afterwards and the next morning I noticed my lower body ached. Glo gave me a look over and determined my sacrum was angled to the left. Luckily, Glo knows what she's doing too, and she soon prodded me back into alignment

I could go on and on, but now's where my talk ends and your search begins.

With love and gratitude,

Alex Novaa

Resources

www.treforall.org

<https://traumaprevention.com/store/shake-it-off-naturally/>