

Yoga for Bi Polar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is classified into a few 'types', according to severity, frequency and range of symptoms experienced. It is believed to be caused genetically or biologically, especially due to trauma and stress, which can be a major influence in onset. It is a mental disorder, whose causes have as yet, only been narrowed down to chemical imbalances within the brain synapses, where either surpluses or deficiencies of neuro-transmitters occur. This may take places as early as childhood and the illness usually manifests in adolescence or adulthood. With excesses of norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin, manic behaviour presides. When these 'good-feel' chemicals bottom out, one falls into depression, which in extreme cases can lead to suicide. Nature's cycles are recognised by their peaks and troughs; Bi Polar Disorder exemplifies and magnifies this. As of yet there is no known cure for the illness and classic remedy is by way of an assortment of mood stabilising medications which help to sustain some sense of normality for the individual. We all know there are infinite varieties of 'normal' and this uniqueness offers us the opportunity to unite through difficulties and disparity, so that we can understand how to live with and beyond them.

'Cycling' is the term for frequency of change between the two ends of the manic-depressive spectrum. Some people have mixed episodes, often changing rapidly. Others may be subject to less change or tend towards only one aspect such as mania. With manic episodes, heightened energy leads to an exaggerated sense of reality, where things are done in excess, such as talking, painting or writing. There is often no desire for sleep or food, strong sexual energy can lead the mind astray and the will to spend finances that one may not even have, all indicate instability with grounded perception. The brain's communication breakdown results in impatience, irritability and anger; the individual is out of synch with their environment. If this type of inflated behaviour continues there can be irrevocable damage to the body. Health is sustaining the correct pressure between tension and relaxation.

Nature maintains balance, despite our personal beliefs. The body seeks homeostasis and this occurs via shifting towards 'south pole', the low or depression. In this aspect life is the exact opposite, whereby the will to live, to relate and therefore be a part of this world is sheared. The apparent futility of life leads some to suicide, while others somehow find the hope and support that caring prescriptions, family and friends are able to provide.

This can be a heavy weight for both those with Bi Polar and those offering loving care. The depressive may wade in heavy feelings of loss, guilt and self loathing. Existential pointlessness expands, the body may devise phantom pains and the mind contracts inwards to an island of solitude and despair.

It is quite understandable how this may rub off on to those around someone with Bi Polar Disorder. Their sometimes indifferent air makes relating with them very challenging and some friendships dissolve under the strain. When love motivates, close ones cultivate a similar mood of detachment. If we don't take everything so personally; meaning if we learn to see through our own sense of attachment to suffering or trying to avoid suffering, then we begin to see beyond the cover or veil. This is the means through which we access spirit, the true underlying essence of life.

Bi Polar is a long term illness, which in some respects encourages the application of long term regulation. This is where yoga succeeds. With the correct diagnosis and medical prescription, (which is thankfully more timely today than in years past), life can be enjoyable for someone with Bi Polar. Regulation of symptoms allows individuals the opportunity to look at yoga philosophy and lifestyle as an incredible and irreplaceable support. Rather than a tool, yoga is the 'box' within which we can hold the world with a sense of perspective, detachment and even humour. Although there isn't currently a known cure for Bi Polar, there are cases where people live full and healthy lives, some with and some without medication. Life is the one mountain and our marrow knows this inherently. Each step follows an inimitable gait, without which we stumble. Nutrition, supplements, exercise, spirituality and psychotherapy are all keywords for anyone seeking to find solace from the barren plains of genius and isolation. For

me, yoga incorporates all of these facets; it is the diamond of life, reaching the hearts of those willing to receive its light.

Postures

Physical practice works between the scales of tension and relaxation; in Bi Polar this is mania and depression. Ascertaining the perfect pitch is the formula for each individual to feel better every day, day by day. When one is feeling manic, the last thing needed is another cup of coffee and to squeeze in 'just one more project' before bedtime - yet this **IS** a sign of the times. When we are feeling low, to remain in the womb-space without entertaining the idea of stepping out..... **we need to ask**, is this why we are here? The answer might be yes, so I'm not challenging these options as wrong, I couldn't; I do this myself, yet, to know when enough is enough is to learn balance, the middle road down which Buddha left his mark. For **manic** episodes seated practice is especially good.

Corpse pose is superlative, (lying still on your back), although one may need to prepare for this through mild standing and then gentle seated forward and side bends and twists. If you can, sit comfortably in **cross legs**, with the support of cushions if necessary, in order to fold forward into a foetal position. The same can be done sitting in a chair or standing, allowing the upper body to relax downward, releasing weight and perspective into the ground. Offer anything from a few breaths to a few minutes and experiment, in order to devise a simple routine that one can incorporate easily and regularly. **Child's pose**, whereby you sit on your heels and bend forward is also incredibly soothing for the nerves - I used to sleep like this as a boy and it does wonders to centre and ground your energy. For breathing, try Kapal Bhati - exhale in many small stages, 'ha ha ha ha ha' to empty your lungs, then pause; inhale into your lower belly softly and repeat the cycle.

For **Depression**, a more vigorous routine will stimulate the nerves; **standing practice** incorporating basic, gentle **sun salutations** (if that suits you) is recommended. Invigorating breathe practice such as **Bhastrika** is excellent. This is like the opposite to Kapal Bhati, where the inhalation now has equal or more dynamism than the exhale. This builds a 'fire' potential, whereas in Kapal Bhati you will be cooling and lowering it. After each short inhale, allow a slight

exhale so that the pressure remains just right. For all of these exercises, it is advisable to ask a yoga teacher to check your method.

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