

## HELPING HANDS

### Guiding, mentoring, supervising – supporting each other

A well-known short story is *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Of course, loneliness is very much part of human life – and working on our own (as we often are doing as yoga teachers) can accentuate these lonely feelings.

I set up a group mentoring project (it could be called ‘guiding’ or ‘supervision’) in 2012 after having worked as a mentor for several years on the Yogacampus Teacher Training. This work developed from my own experience. I have been teaching yoga since 2001. In addition, I was in psychotherapy 2003-2012, am involved in a men’s therapy group and continue to regularly see a supervisor.

My aspiration is that the mentor groups provide support to enable sustainability. Few yoga TTs offer ongoing support after graduation. Many yoga TTs can be limited and basic. A 200-hour training is a drop in the ocean. Of course, we all have to start somewhere. But continuing learning and continuing support is essential for us to evolve and grow as yoga teachers.

#### DETAILS

Since that first mentor group, there have been more than 50 participants. Each group is limited to five people and runs for six meetings (approximately once a month), with the dates being decided at the first meeting. The cost is £180 (which is £15 per hour) and slots are available on Sundays 7pm-9pm or Mondays midday-2pm. It is run at my home in north London so takes place in a friendly and hospitable space.

Once the group starts, it is closed (which means that no-one else can join). It is grounded in confidentiality, openness and trust. The sessions become a space where we explore teaching yoga: peaks and troughs, the difficulties, the mechanics, the delights. The frustrations, the sorrows, the joys of being a yoga teacher. This is not group therapy and I am not a psychotherapist. This is a group of sharing and support within the context of teaching yoga.

The group is a way of improving our professional excellence and a tool to help us work at the growing edge. It can be a process of being recognised and being encouraged – and being stretched. We all have moments of running on empty, losing inspiration, feeling flatness. Becoming disconnected can be common for many of us when teaching yoga.

By connecting with each other in this confidential space, we can realise the commonality of our stories as teachers and thus help to lighten each other’s load. Through this mutual support, we can lessen competitiveness and the isolation of individuality.

This is not about pretending who we want to be, something that can take place on social media. The delusions, the superficiality, the many masks of online communication can be demoralising and exhausting. These mentoring groups can be about expressing vulnerability with other people who understand – and doing this while actually seeing faces and hearing voices in person. The simple sound of a human voice can be deeply connecting. The seeing of a human face can encourage empathy and understanding.

In the process of speaking our stories, there is the possibility for help and the potential for healing. There is an energy in speaking long-held concerns that assists our motivation to start resolving them. Some of the concerns covered include:

- a studio wants me to change how I am teaching
- “I am worried that a student is self-harming. What could I do?”
- how much to charge for private clients

- “Why I am not getting the classes that I want to teach?”
- how to teach when injured

### **WORKING ALLIANCES**

The group is a working alliance between the participant and myself as a facilitator. In this alliance, you are able to offer an account of your work. As a result, there is reflection on your work, you can receive feedback and, where appropriate, guidance. My role is that of enabling, supporting and encouraging participants so that there is a reflective awareness of our self and of our surroundings.

This alliance can enable you to become more grounded in competence, creativity and compassion. Through this, you can give your best possible service to the people who come to your class. This is about improving our skills. Giving all of us more techniques and more tools.

Through this group, there can be an unsticking when we become stuck and an aiding to find the energy to keep going. The reality is that many of us teaching yoga will at times be over-stressed and face the risk of becoming burnt out. There is a delicate balance between being competent and being complacent, between exhaustion and being engaged. This group aspires to help us to be better balanced and be in that ‘good enough’ centre.

Participating together can help us to develop our own inner supervisor, where we are more able to review what we are doing and where we are growing our inner confidence – the confidence that is necessary for sustaining the practice of teaching yoga.

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

It is important to be clear that mentoring is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that we can look more clearly in our mirrors. This is also an opportunity. Each person has their own experience during the six months and it is very likely that there are ups and downs. Each group has its own dynamic – its own characters and their issues. Each group with different personalities and particular issues.

For many other professions that are people-centred like yoga teaching, mentoring is compulsory. Mentoring is a non-negotiable principle. Guidance and support given in a formal structure. I believe that these groups are a great way of supporting us as yoga teachers and helping us to avoid pitfalls and find our potential.

### **IN THE WORDS OF PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS**

“They’ve been great. I like the continuity and the spacing between sessions. It feels just about right...I’m happy with what I have gained.”

“I didn’t know what to expect but it has surpassed expectations... It’s been a really valuable experience for me.”

“This was a wonderful, supportive experience for me. I’m so grateful to Norman for providing the framework to help build confidence and reflection in my teaching.”

“Thank you for creating this safe space. It’s been an affirming, positive, re-assuring experience... Talking openly was a reminder that you’re not alone... I think this is something that all yoga teachers should do.”

“Very rich, empowering and far surpassed my expectations. I’ve felt really held and heard...I’ve really grown in confidence since beginning course of sessions and feel much more self-acceptance.”

“Overall these sessions have been extremely helpful and supportive. To be in a safe environment, speak your mind and hear it back was very welcoming.”

“Norman is a wonderful mentor. He brings together experience, great listening skills and a refreshing sense of humour. He has a kind and grounded personality and leads the sessions with an open heart and mind.”

*In the words of Judith Hanson Lasater. PhD*

“I am so pleased to learn that Norman Blair is offering this unique group setting for yoga teachers. In this time of turmoil in the yoga world, it is imperative that we support each other in becoming the best teachers we can be. I wish all yoga teachers had the opportunity to gather and discuss the art of teaching in such a group. Thank you, Norman, for sharing your wisdom and devotion to yoga.”

#### **IN SHORT**

If you are interested in attending, please contact me

e: [yogawithnorman@gmail.com](mailto:yogawithnorman@gmail.com)

m: 07900 027291

£180 for six sessions

Groups limited to 5 participants

Sunday 7-9pm or Monday midday-2pm

Zolder Studio, Boundary Road, Turnpike Lane, N22

My thanks to my supervisor, Frankie Sidhu. She is based in Brighton and can be contacted at <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/therapist/frankie-sidhu/>

This piece has been significantly inspired by *Making the most of supervision* by Brigid Proctor and Francesca Inskipp.

#### **OTHER YOGA MENTORING GROUPS**

*London*

Jess Glenny ([www.embodyyogadance.co.uk](http://www.embodyyogadance.co.uk))

Sarai Harvey-Smith ([www.saraiharveysmith.com](http://www.saraiharveysmith.com))

*Devon*

Kate Hewett ([www.bendykate.com](http://www.bendykate.com))

*and elsewhere...*

I am sure there will be more in the future. This is an idea whose time is coming.

Norman Blair  
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