

Experimentation: a good recipe for kriya

By Brook McCarthy

Who knew that kriya could be compared to cake making? Experimenting on oneself, applying what you learn on students with similar circumstances, refining your methods and sharing your insights is a vocation for yoga therapists. Yet so too, it appears, are baking analogies.

“My teachers include Sri Yogendra, Swami Gitananda, A.G. Mohan and Donna Farhi,” acknowledges Leigh Blashki. “To develop the Anguli Mudra Kriya, I experimented with different pranayamas, mudras, mantras, and visualisations. While I baked the cake, they provided the ingredients.”

As Director of training programs at the Australian Institute of Yoga Therapy, the secretary of the Australian Association of Yoga Therapists, Vice President of Yoga Australia, a member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists’ Council of Advisors, and a peer reviewer for the International Journal of Yoga Therapy with 33 years of teaching experience and 20 years of yoga therapy, Leigh is well-placed to develop a kriya which was inspired by Nadi Shodana.

“I always enjoyed Nadi Shodana, but sometimes felt a bit frustrated, like something was missing,” says Leigh. “I began by building on the mudras. Depending on the unique needs of the student, we can increase or decrease the different elements by applying the thumb, or fire elements, to the different fingers.

“We can start at a very basic level and then apply different variations, adding mantras and visualisations, including those from different religious traditions if they are relevant to the student, and mula bandha on occasion. The effect is a powerful vitalisation and purification of the body-mind. Like all practices, it needs to be done steadily, over time.”

Leigh experimented with the kriya for several years, applying it with different yoga therapy clients, including those with physical limitations as the kriya is performed in a seated position.

Last year, he presented it to the Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research run by the International Association of Yoga Therapists on Monterrey Peninsular in California. For Leigh, it was an added delight to visit Monterrey for the first time as it was home of legendary Monterrey International Pop Festival, the first widely promoted and heavily attended rock festival, which pioneered the way for Woodstock and others.

Talking technique

When I ask Leigh to explain the technique in more detail, he invites me along to the [Australian Yoga Therapy Conference](#) in August where he is presenting the Kriya.

“I’m not a fan of writing down technique. People read something and take it on shallowly, thinking that’s all there is to it. They need to learn this face-to-face,” stresses Leigh. “Yoga therapy is malleable to suit the needs of the individual, alive with infinite variations, adjustments, tools and techniques to meet the student where they are at.”

The explosion of yoga in Australia in recent years has provided far more opportunities for teachers and students of yoga to dip their toes in different styles and traditions, and receive yoga teaching in different formats, from classes of 60 plus people, to YouTube videos, audio downloads, cards, website subscriptions and E-courses. For the urban yogi, choice can overwhelm and lead to sporadic practice.

“We need to relearn the art of a relationship,” says Leigh, warming to his theme.

“We need to stay connected through face-to-face relationships and small groups.

A.G. Mohan used to say, ‘in the West, you are losing community. You need to come together, to sit together’.”

And so we return to baking cakes. “A practice of yoga, a sequence or a fixed way of doing things is like getting a ready-made Sara Lee cake. People can get so much more out of yoga if they understand the different ingredients and their applications. They can then make a unique recipe all of their own.”

While Leigh’s take on the importance of face-to-face relationships bucks modern trends in yoga, his embracing and encouragement of experimentation and lack of proprietary makes him very modern indeed.

About the author

Brook McCarthy is a writer and director of creative communications agency [Yoga Reach](http://www.yogareach.com.au/) <http://www.yogareach.com.au/>, which helps yoga and wellbeing businesses to thrive.