

# **RACHEL'S STORY OF YOGA AND RECOVERY**

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*Stories of Yoga and Recovery Told by Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma: Exploring Body, Self  
and Relationships*

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Rachel is a Caucasian woman in her late thirties, who sought out the practice of yoga as part of her recovery from a sexual assault that occurred within an intimate relationship. Despite working with a trusted counsellor following the assault, Rachel still struggled with the profoundly dysregulating experience of being trapped in a body that was no longer safe:

I had never experienced anything before where it was like, I *don't* want to be in my body.

I don't feel safe in my body. I just don't feel safe. I didn't want to be there. I felt very vulnerable. You know, it just felt like such a vulnerable place to be.

The assault had left Rachel with a visceral sense of danger that fundamentally altered her relationship with herself and her social world. Normally an affectionate and direct person, Rachel recoiled from contact:

Cause I didn't want to be touched by anyone, I was pretty withdrawn from friends and things, and just not feeling, it's like I didn't want to be in any situations where I could be touched too? Even hugged, even my friends, like hugged and ...didn't want to be around—so it was just, I was having this feeling of not being safe in my body and not wanting to exist in my body...”

The assault had also altered the way her body and mind processed sexual sensations. The exploration of pleasure, even without the presence of a partner, only triggered feelings of grief:

...there's this *physical* aspect to it too, you know like I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't do like solo sex, I couldn't, I was just crying, that's when I knew I started, like I was really affected, like every time I kind of tried to do that I was, that took a long time, but then I would just cry every time I came. Like bawl.

The I-poem constructed from Rachel's description of this time highlights the ever present sense of threat that defined her sense of self:

I hadn't really experienced

I was just

I just didn't want to be

I'm like

I don't want to be

I don't feel safe

I couldn't

I was thinking

I didn't want to

I didn't want to be

I just

I, it was awful

I was just talking

I didn't want to be

I was pretty withdrawn

I didn't want to be

Where I could be touched

The repetition of the phrase "I don't want to be" demonstrates just how trapped Rachel felt. The container that was supposed to protect her from danger (i.e. her body) had failed, and so she remained caught in a constant flight from self. In addition, the betrayal of being assaulted by a trusted partner fundamentally disorganized the meaning system through which Rachel navigated the world:

...it was such a violation. Such a violation of trust too. That this person that was capable, that I trusted so much...I just never thought that they were, would be capable of something like that. And so the trust was, I was just so fearful in my body all the time, and it was like I couldn't, I didn't feel safe inside *my* body. And I didn't feel safe around others in this body. It was such a betrayal. And I'd never experienced anything like that. And so it was like you couldn't trust yourself. I'd betrayed, my body, my mind had betrayed me in choosing this person. In trusting this person. Or having left yourself kind of vulnerable.

It was within this context of profound fear and a "deep depression" that she resolved to engage in an active recovery process. Rachel herself is a graduate student in the health sciences and believes in a holistic approach to healing. Already engaged in talk therapy and experimenting with gentle shiatsu massage, at the suggestion of her counsellor Rachel began researching trauma-sensitive yoga. She found a practitioner in the Vancouver area and enrolled in a workshop series entitled "Yoga for Anxiety and Depression" that would be taught with a trauma-sensitive lens. She was also able to obtain a scholarship that helped to make the cost of the class more manageable.

The first day of the class, the yoga teacher spent some time explaining what the students could expect from the class and her approach to teaching. In addition, the teacher shared her own story of using yoga to recover from a violent sexual assault, a story to which Rachel could clearly relate:

Knowing that this was someone who has experienced something similar to what I, she'd experienced a violent sexual assault. You know, you don't always need to experience it, it was like "oh, she knows what its like to feel this way inside.

The teacher's disclosure of her own experience of suffering and recovery, helped create an implicit experience of empathy within Rachel. Although Rachel did not explicitly disclose that she was recovering from an assault, she still felt understood by the teacher:

It still was fresh, um, and I don't think I disclosed to [the yoga teacher], I think all I said was you know I'm not feeling safe in my body. Like I think she knew what that meant though?

This experience of relatedness and being understood helped Rachel feel safe within the class.

The teacher's overall presence and way of being also contributed a sense of safety:

...she's just very gentle, and it was very, she's like a badass too, which I like. You know like, I trust people who curse (laughs). And she was really no nonsense, she had a great sense of humor, very warm, open and just like, ya this dynamic force. And I felt very safe! She was like a love warrior. You know? Like you know those people that are connected and really compassionate and empathic, but you also know like, they're really badasses, you know?...Really strong.

In addition to an experience of *relatedness*, established by empathy, and *nurturance*, established by a gentle and warm teaching approach, the teacher's confident presence also created a secure and intentional frame within which her students could feel safe. In Rachel's description of her teacher there is a sense of trust in the teacher's ability to protect her students.

Proceeding from this introduction and in the knowledgeable presence of her teacher, the class began with some simple centering practices. One of the first memories Rachel recalls from the class involved laying on the mat, and moving her arms from the floor, toward the ceiling, and back again in time with her inhale and exhale. She observed the movements of her body:

I had to lay there and be with myself for the first time. You know, and, that's not something that I was ok doing, before. And like, just like the breathing...gentle lifting of your arms and things. And everything is you're invited to, you know? And everything is kind of with permission, and like, it's so gentle.

The return of safety to her body was a poignant experience:

...it was like the first time it felt *ok again*, to be with me again. And like, oh, its emotional, its emotional...Ya, that was the first time, I remember just like laying in the room and breathing, and with [the teacher] kind of instructing us and it was, it was like coming home to your body again. You know, I was like "oh, you! I missed you", you know? And that's when I started to feel safe. You know I started to feel like I didn't, I wanted, I was ok with being in my body again.

Rachel's description evokes a sense of a person returning from exile to reunite with her long-separated loved one. The I-poem from this description highlights the mixture of surprise and relief from longing that accompanied the return to her body:

I remember

I was like, "oh!"

I missed you

I started to feel

I started to feel

I didn't

I wanted

I was ok

This I-poem also speaks of how re-engagement and repair of her body (“I started to feel) fostered a re-connection to self (I missed you) and a foundation of security (I was ok).

The present finally was beginning to feel safe again. In that moment her mind and body were not pre-occupied with the remnants of the assault, but rather joined in a curious exploration of self.

I remember just sitting there. And I thought this is the first time I’ve sat still, and was like, I’m moving my arms now, and this is what my breath is like...it was just, just the simplicity of breathing, moving your limbs, and being aware, like you know, I’m here now, I’m in my body, this is what my breath feels like. Just feeling my arms move back and forth. It was like the first time I was in my body again, and was ok to be there and it felt safe! And it felt, ya, it really felt safe again. It felt safe again.

In this passage there is a sense of curiosity and wonder, as if she is getting to know herself for the first time (“this is my body, this is what my breath feels like”).

For Rachel the practice of *vinyasa*, linking breath, body and mind through movement, was particularly reparative:

And then after the yoga...that’s what brought me back into myself again. Like after that I felt safer again. I felt safer and safer each time...I just, I remember everything just sitting in that class, like movement, I’m in here, I’m doing this, you know, this is my body, I’m moving my arm., I was so, connected with the breath work and the movement. And connecting the breath to the movement. Everything was very, like the pranayama breathing, that’s the soothing, that’s what kind of chills out your body. And moving with that breath was just like, it was just coming into your body and moving things for the first time, and feeling whole again.

These collection of passages all evokes a sense of innocence, an experience of self as fresh and undamaged. The ability to experience her body in this way, with new eyes, was predicated upon feeling safe – “And I really do credit with feeling safe again in my body”. Rachel talks about how in past years with another yoga teacher, pranayama breathwork helped her overcome panic attacks and gave her a sense of control over this dysregulating experience. This trauma-sensitive yoga class reminded her of this resource, and helped to reframe her beliefs about body as dangerous. By linking attention, breath and movement, Rachel could disengage from ruminative thought patterns (“pull you out of your head”) and use her body as resource for regulating internal experience and restoring safety.

Another I-poem from Rachel’s description of her experience of the *vinyasa* practice highlights the dynamic nature of this return to agency:

I felt safer

I felt safer and safer

I just

I just remember

I’m in here

I’m doing this

I’m moving

I’m just

I was so, connected

Contrasted with the I-poem from Rachel’s experience of her body prior to beginning yoga, which emphasizes a sense of self as trapped and defensive (“I don’t want, I don’t feel, I couldn’t), this

poem underlines how safety and active engagement of the body helped connect her to a sense of self as agent.

When asked for an image or metaphor to help demonstrate what it was like to be in her body in the months following the assault, Rachel talks about an image of a small, wounded part of herself:

P: the images that are coming up for me are like a smaller self, inside of a larger self.

Kind of like a smaller me trapped inside here... You know? Just like a smaller me, just kind of almost trapped inside.

I: Yeah, I see you kind of, like almost like in a crouch

P: Yeah, just like kind of wrapped up, almost in fetal position, kind of wrapped up and crawling. And then like wrapped up in like, a little ball... It just felt like, it was interesting cause I haven't, it was such a unique feeling. I just didn't want to be in my body. I didn't want to be in my body around anyone else. And I felt so vulnerable. Like I was saying, it was *vulnerable*, I was just *raw*, and I was, I felt weak.

This description evokes a sense of a cowering, terrified person collapsing under the weight of ever present danger. However, as safety was restored to her body through yoga, a new image emerges:

I: ...the other thought that comes up for me as you're talking about this time and what a loss it was, and so afraid you were, to then the converse image would be this moment when you're lying in the room, and suddenly its ok to be somewhere that you thought wasn't ok (Yeah, yeah) and like, then what kind of image comes up there for you?

P: I see like lots of white, like white is like healing, and when I picture myself it's kind of like being filled with a white light again. And I kind of see that the little, what do they call it, homunculus, like kind of that person inside, but is like frolicking. Like just checking things out, free, happy again...curious, I feel like frolicking. Like these are the arms again, these are the legs again, look how, this is ok again. And just kind of exploring. You know I was saying it was like coming into your body again for the first time.

I: There's a newness

P: There's a newness to it. So that's why I picture "oh, this again!" you know that they're excited.

I: Kind of child like? Innocent?

P: Yeah. Exactly. Like there's a youthful, playfulness to it as well.

This image demonstrates how for Rachel, the core emotional states related to play, exploration and joy, became accessible through the restoration of safety and a focus on present moment experience. There is also an echo of an innocent, childlike developmental stage in which the world is explored through the body.

While joyful, the intensity of reconnection with her body also bordered on overwhelming. Rachel describes the complex combination of joy and grief that emerges from the inseparable relationship between recovery and what was lost to trauma:

And then it was also, you know I find repair work is so emotional too. To feel good again, was *so* emotional. I think I just laid there and cried. I was just like crying. Like at first you're just breathing and lifting my arms up above my head with my breath, I was just crying because it was so powerful to be safe and feel good again. To be in that place

again. Its like when you have that reparative, corrective work, its just like your body's been thirsting for it, like starving for it. And then you get it and its like, whoa, it's a little much too. You know?

I: Its like a relief, but also a bit of like, just a lot all at once.

P: Yeah, and it's like, you know if you go through abuse or an assault, it's like the opposite. You know? It's like the opposite feeling, but they're connected. If you're feeling, so like the first time laying down and feeling ok again, and feeling good in my body again. It's the counterpoint to the pain, but they're opposite sides of a spectrum. And so it reminds you too, of what it was like before. It reminds you of what was like before.

I: Mmm, so almost seems like a grieving in a sense? Like not in a negative way, but there's almost still like pain in the relief and joy. I don't know?

P: Yeah, totally.

Other complex emotions arose as she began to heal. Rachel resented that she had to do this reparative work at all. After already surviving the assault, she now had to go through these intensely emotional experiences, at times even re-experiencing aspects of what happened to her. This seemed wholly unfair. It was the talk therapy that Rachel engaged in while practicing yoga that helped her to separate out the positive steps she was taking to care for her body, from the anger at having to take these steps at all.

Rachel also appreciated the way the trauma sensitive frame helped her re-organize her relationship with bodily pain. Having been through the intense pain of sexual assault, coupled with an experience of powerlessness, the trauma-informed yoga room had to provide a different kind of experience in relation to pain. This frame restored Rachel's sense of choice and control

over how to work with those uncomfortable and painful sensations, with an emphasis on actively choosing to care for self:

Like there's a real mindfulness around not being in pain again. You know making sure you're comfortable and you're doing—and you're not in pain again. Which I feel like isn't in other yoga classes? That mindfulness of like “this is hurting, you probably should do something else, or make a modification.” And ...she doesn't leave you in positions very long also. So you're not in that state [of pain]. And then if I started to feel uncomfortable, I would just go into a different pose. Because it is really activating. To feel that pain in your body again. Which is what I think the trauma-yoga protects you from.

Restoring this choice meant that Rachel didn't have to fear that pain anymore. When activated, she could take action that altered this experience. She would never be trapped in that pain.

Again, restoration of this control is the antithesis to the feeling of powerlessness that defines the violence of assault.

Rachel contrasts this focus on listening with care to the internal signals of the body, to the overarching frame of many mainstream yoga classes: “Compared to being in other yoga classes, where it's just not done through the lens of, it's done with like—the poses are the thing, the focus. And being able to twist your body.” She connects her experience in the trauma-sensitive class to the philosophy of a previous yoga teacher with whom she had studied:

Like my yogi I love at home he would say, “You can still twist your body like a pretzel and still be a shitty person”. You know, he's like “it means nothing”. He's like “well, what are we doing here?” ...And when we'd go into tree pose, if we fell out, we we're supposed to laugh. And he's like, “what are you doing, you're standing on one foot. And

let's calm down here for a second. We have to be angry at ourselves because we can't stand on one foot today?" (laughs) So, and he was like "and that's the practice, like the laughing, after falling out is the practice". He's like "use that next time you take the subway. Can you laugh next time you miss the subway?"

In her yoga teacher's questions, there is a resistance to the discourse that dominates some yoga classes embedded in Western culture; this discourse focuses on performance and meeting a rigid standard defined by an external authority. For a survivor of trauma, this performative frame can exacerbate the feeling of powerlessness and suffering originally established in traumatic circumstances. For Rachel, the frame of the trauma-sensitive yoga class subverted this authoritative, critical discourse that defines part of the dominant North American yoga culture, and which also shaped parts of her childhood experience:

And it was just like this—I have felt in other yoga classes, I don't know maybe from childhood, which I don't like. The pain in your body kind of stuff. That wasn't the goal. There was a permission there. If you're feeling pain, if you can't do this with joy today, if you can't push yourself today with a smile on your face, then don't do that. And I think I definitely had a fear of other yoga classes, of being not safe! You don't feel safe. Like I'm going to be left in this pose how long? And there's a mindset of the culture and of the class, and everyone else is in their poses working really hard. And you're just like, I'm miserable. I'm miserable, I *hate* this. And I don't want to hate this. I want to feel that joy in my body. That's what helped me reconnect too is, is the joy of being in your body again. That simple breathing, that simple movement. Just the simple things that your body can do. You could find joy there again. And if you were feeling that pain, cause it is, like any of those physical pain sensations again, you're just recoiling from... Like

where if I wasn't permissive, or didn't come from that school of thought earlier, I'd stay in there. And you're like, "when is this over?" You're enduring.

Rachel emphasizes how, following trauma, physical pain in the body is experienced in a fundamentally different way because it has become intrinsically linked to the entire gamut of emotions associated with being trapped and powerless. The key to correcting this association of physical pain with trauma lied in the restoration of agency:

There were things that we did [in the trauma-sensitive yoga class], and I was like "I'm doing that for a second". She'd hold for a second and I'm like, "and I'm out"...I don't want that sensation again in my body. I was so resistant to it. It was so, it was a little jarring to have that pain come back...and it was on like levels that I so didn't want as soon as I felt it. There was such a connection to what had happened. So to have that permission, that permission was given to take yourself out of things. And that you know your body, that you know best too. I know my body best. I know what I need right now. Like "this pose hurts too much". And what we carry in our, the emotion that we carry in our body. And how it can be released. Is really kind of palpable."

Rachel credits her ability to take care of her needs with the way her teacher created a strong frame that reinforced internally motivated choice. Throughout the workshop series, the teacher used language designed to reinforce the theoretical frame of trauma-sensitive yoga ("I invite you") and also explained this theoretical perspective to the class with brief discussion and take-home reading.

The trauma-sensitive yoga teacher also introduced the role of ritual in creating safety and bringing yoga into the students' every day lives:

“And then we kind of created little rituals for ourselves too, that was part of our practice, to kind of cultivate a home practice as well. And so that was nice, too, just have a little time, we set up a little altar of things, and that was, my little altar was just little things that remind me of friends or myself, and you set up a little space...and so it was like, burning sage and just kind of making my space, like safe.

The practice of ritual was another method of cultivating intentionality and a return to self on a daily basis:

“like having a word for your day, really bringing in mindfulness, intentionality. And having some things at the end of the day. And things you can do that aren't so overwhelming. Still are challenging to do every day, obviously...Like any habit...But, just the setting up the space, and I like burning sage and just, you're just going to sit here and be with you for a while. Which is rare...our first homework was setting up a space. Like you're setting up a space where you're going to try and do your ten minutes, or fifteen minutes a day. And setting up a space and bringing in things that I want. Things that I love, you know, I just can see as I'm---

I: Yeah symbols

P: Little symbols. Things that represent one of my friends. And another thing that represented friends or family. Or, you know, my dog (laughs)

I: Yeah, things that bring you joy.

P: Things that bring me joy! And so setting that up.

The I-poem from Rachel's extended description demonstrates both the intentionality and joy of connection to self that is involved in ritualistic practice :

I like burning sage

I mean

I aspire

I actually do

I think

I want

I love

I just can see

I've incorporated sage burning

I love

I'm very sensory

I really like

I feel

I've set it up

I've put these things here

I'm beginning

As Rachel reflects back on this experience of reconnecting with her body and self through yoga, she returns again and again to the essential role of safety and intentionality within relationship that facilitated this reparative experience. She talks about how the act of signing up for a group entitled "Yoga for Anxiety and Depression" includes an implicit disclosure and admission of shared experience amongst all the students:

But everyone that was there had some anxiety or some depression and, so everyone was very vulnerable...So everyone is there kind of stepping into it. So people were very

forthcoming...And it was just a very—you know over those weeks people did share things about what they were going through. Even just sharing, being in an anxiety and depression group is something—

I: There's some kind of shared, it's really personal--

P: It was really personal! And I of course think we should be talking about it more, and be more open and stuff. But there is still a lot of stigma around it. So kind of even coming in with that shared experience, that vulnerability, was really meaningful.

To be vulnerable in a group setting, and to then be understood and treated with care from that place of vulnerability, is in itself a corrective experience that fosters safety. Rachel describes how she is acutely sensitive to interpersonal dynamics, and so she was attuned to how the collective vulnerability and intention of her classmates also supported personal transformation:

This was *so so* safe. You know, and you are, it's reparative, and its corrective, and you're sharing this space in this—people that are like attuned with energy, it feels different. It feels *different*, you know? And the mindset and the energy that people are bringing into a space, you know—that everyone's lining up for power yoga and I'm like, no way, that feels not good. (laughter)...But for me I'm like no, that feels wrong...But the collective has a lot to do with the safe space that is created.

I: uh huh, and I hear that it's like that there is a really intentionality, like it's a shared intention?

P: yeah, yeah. I mean its mindfulness, and there's an intention. And you're here, it's not just like, I think that's also very meaningful too. It's not like we're here to exercise, you know. Yes, we are also making our bodies strong, but there's a much deeper purpose. It's more holistic than that, it's not just you know -- the yoga for physical yoga sake

doesn't make sense to me, or doesn't speak to me. And this has deeper meaning, deeper purpose going through it.

Rachel also emphasizes the important role of her relationship with her yoga teacher in establishing a frame of safety. She highlights how the gentle nature of instruction reinforced an ethic of care and non-harm to self, and how the language the teacher used (e.g. "I invite you to...") emphasized permission and choice that returned agency to each student:

P: And establishing that relationship, I think, no small part of it was my instructor. That I felt a connection to, I felt safe with. I felt they were very experienced and knowledgeable. And the safety means more than anything. It was that she created this safety. And that was established. And like your trust, that alliance, you know...And you're like, ok, you get it, you get me, you know what's going on. And then you have someone who's in that power position. You know, you're still vulnerable. You're in a vulnerable spot. And you have someone who is, like an expert. And you're vulnerable, you'll do what they say...but having someone say "No, you know. You decide. You choose. Your choice. You decide". It goes back onto your own knowing and understanding. And gives you that permission, takes that power dynamic—

I: Moves the power back?

P: Moves the power back!

Rather than just being a pre-requisite for the work of repair, the safe relationship with her yoga teacher in itself became reparative. The *experience* of relationship with her yoga instructor as safe, her vulnerability honoured with care, and her body's agency and self-knowledge respected, subverts the abuse of power inherent in sexual assault, and which lay at the core of her wound.

Rachel describes how this experience of trust gave her something that exists in a space beyond words:

So creating that safety and having that choice and that permission given back to that person is—Its almost something like, I didn't know was gone, but I wasn't able to articulate until I received in the class. Like I wasn't able to articulate that I needed that permission again, I needed the power to come back to me. I needed to be in control again, um, in control of my body, even in this class, in control of my body.

She talks about how the experience of assault was so visceral, and that she needed to have an equally visceral experience of reclaiming control:

...it's what it feels like in the room to have the control given back to you. Or being able to reclaim, you're having that power back, you're having that control back...all I could say I remember that time before I started going was like, "I don't feel safe in my body". I couldn't even, it was even difficult to explain what that meant...Like I was saying before it's almost without language...You're body has the language, or your body is able to access these things and feel these things that I—I never would have gone in and been like, I need this, this and this. I didn't know I needed what I was given. What I was able to receive in that class. And that was able to facilitate that healing.

Although Rachel had benefited from similar forms of yoga practice in the past, this most recent transformative healing experience has given the practice a new sense of the sacred. She talks about how the ritual burning of sage symbolizes the healing process she has gone through and a continued intention to treat herself with care:

I've incorporated sage burning into more and more things, cause I love, I'm very—(sensory?) Sensory, I really like smells, they're very soothing to me. And like the

symbolic washing and like cleansing you know? And just bringing it in to your different chakras and things. Like that, I feel like it just honours also what you are doing, you know?

I: Mmhmm, what do you mean?

P: Just um, instead of kind of jumping into poses, you're—It adds that intention, that mindfulness into the practice that [the yoga teacher] was trying to incorporate. Like here's, this is my space, and I've set it up, and I've put these things here and this is how I'm beginning...And the reasons for doing it have kind of shifted because of the, since the—doing it with a different lens in the trauma-sensitive class you're like, it is this kind of repair work that you're returning to, this healing. This self-healing. You know it's kind of taken on this other form of this healing, right? It's part of the work, part of the healing, part of the repair that it's become now. Maybe that added aspect of the ritual has kind of made this more—

I: Sacred? The word sacred is coming up for me—

P: Yeah, yep. Exactly, this more sacred act. You know, this is—And because of the impact it had on me and everything, it's something that you honour. And you're loving yourself and being gentle and really caring for yourself again.

Yogic ritual honours the sacredness of the healing process, a necessary component to repairing the damage caused by an assaultive act of spiritual desecration:

I: Yeah. Its like, this sense of kind of making your body a sacred place again.

P: Mmhmm! Exactly.

I: You know, cause that's been violated, right?

P: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, like you're cleansing this temple again. Like it was desecrated, right?...And then you're using the yoga to heal yourself, to heal and to make this sacred again. And safe again, and honored again. You know what, I felt... you're honouring yourself again, you're almost like self, I don't want to say worship but you're kind of, the self, like you're making this all sacred again. And more so and different than it was before. But yeah there is a, the reclaiming! The reclaiming and the healing and making your body that was—yeah that word desecrated comes to me. And you're taking it and you're taking it back and making it you know, not just a place to be safe again too, but a sacred place again.

I: It just brings to mind, like, in yogic writing there's this kind of fundamental idea that we are always veiled from the divine in us. And that yoga, you know bringing mind and body together is the act of really truly connecting to our fundamental divineness. Which is connectedness, which is bigger than ourselves. But that also in us is the divine. That we are often not, we can't see that because of all the different shit that happens in life, you know? But then that this act of going inwards and connecting brings us back to that.

P: yeah, and isn't *Namaste* like “the divine in me recognizes the—

I: the deepest most profound, yeah

P: recognizes the deep of you”. Yeah, that speaks to me, yeah.

**Voice Analysis.** At the outset of Rachel's story, we hear *voices of both body and relationships as dangerous*. These voices are both marked by descriptions of not wanting to be in her body or around other people, overall withdrawal from contact (internal or external), the loss of trust and pleasure, and an ongoing sense of betrayal and fear. However, as Rachel begins practicing trauma-sensitive yoga, another *voice of re-connection to self through the body*

emerges, highlighting the essential role of accessing the body as a conduit to healing self. This voice emphasizes a sense of exploration and joy to be with self/body in the present moment and a sense of experiential knowing and feeling in the here and now, in a way that lies beyond language.

Several relationship-oriented voices support this safe return to the body. There is a *voice of teacher as guide*, holding a strong frame that supports safety, marked by Rachel's discussion of the language her teacher used, the theory that informed her teaching approach, and her teacher's presence as strong and confident. A related *voice of connection in relationship* highlights how the experience of feeling understood and relating to others through shared vulnerability and collective intention also reinforced the safety that allowed a return to body.

Rachel's story also speaks of twinned voices of body and relationship. A *voice of nurturance in relationship*, marked by an encouragement to care for the body with compassion and a general mindfulness of the needs of students, directly influences a *voice of nurturance of body*. This latter voice is highlighted in Rachel's descriptions of working with pain through gentleness, and listening to her body's needs. A *voice of restoration of agency in relationship*, highlighted in Rachel's discussion of the transfer back of power through permission and choice, directly supports a *voice of body as agent*, heard in Rachel's descriptions of actively using her body to regulate, a return to movement, and a delight in what her body *can do*.

Finally, all these voices of body and relationship harmonize in an almost transcendent way. In Rachel's experience of relationship through yoga, the voices of a strong frame, nurturance, connection, and a restoration of agency, combine to create a *voice of relationship as transformative*. This voice is emphasized in Rachel's description of a visceral understanding of safety triggered by a direct *experience* of trust in relationship, and the power of a collectively

held intention toward healing. Closely related to this transformation in relationship is *a voice of body as sanctuary*. As Rachel was able to connect to her body in the present moment, nurture her body, and experience the active agency of her body, she experiences a return to her body as a sacred refuge. This voice of body as sanctuary is particularly highlighted in her descriptions of coming home to her body, being ensconced in a white light, a connection to a joyful and child-like part of self, and the restoration of honour and sacredness to her body and self.