

E60 | Holy Grounds | Lisa Ash Drakard
Project Zion Podcast

Katie Langston

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Carla Long

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast on your host, Carla Long. And today you are listening to Holy Grounds series where we explore different spiritual practices and how they make a difference in our lives. And I'm here with a good friend of mine, Lisa Ash Drakard. Who teaches yoga in Kansas City, Missouri? Or is it Westport, Kansas City? I'm not sure exactly where you teach, but Lisa, thank you so much for being here.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Well, thanks for having me, Carla.

Carla Long

I'm excited to hear about you. So let's hear a little bit about you. And then let's just jump into the podcast.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, absolutely. Um, I am a yoga teacher and a business owner. I own a yoga studio here in Kansas City, Missouri. I'm also a Community of Christ minister and a writer and a new mom.

Carla Long

Yes, Lisa and I were just talking about being new moms together and how it is a life changer for sure. So, Lisa, let's just jump right into you. This podcast can I think I know what spiritually practice we're gonna be talking about today, and it's yoga. So why don't you just jump in and tell me a little bit about it?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, I think the idea of yoga as a spiritual practice is new to many people. It's kind of a contemporary thing that most of us know what a yoga class looks like for magazines or TV now. But yoga actually has a very specific world view. It's not just a fitness routine or a wellness routine. The word yoga itself is a spiritual practice because it's a translation of the word from an ancient language called Sanskrit, which comes to us from like the Indus River Valley areas to kind of like ancient India. And the translation for the word yoga is actually, "union with the divine". So it's a philosophy. It's a world view. It's an architecture for health and well being. And then, of course, it's something that you can take classes in which is what I do at my studio. We offer classes and meditation in yoga pranayama, which is a fancy word for breath work. And

then, of course, the poses which are therapeutic to healing the body and all that together is one spiritual practice.

Carla Long

So you do yoga and meditation all in one, or it's separated out?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Both, actually, so it's It looks like three different spiritual practices, but it's all under one heading, which, as Christians were really familiar with, we're familiar with the idea of a try you or a Trinity. We're familiar with the idea of body, mind and spirit or Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. So yoga actually has eight pieces, not just three, but three of those are breast work, meditation, and then the poses that we're most familiar with.

Carla Long

Oh, that's a really interesting. So can you tell us a little bit more? I love how you link that already to Trinity. I think that is I I'm gonna have to think about that, uh, in a little bit. But can you tell us about the eight different parts of yoga?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Sure. The eight different parts of yoga. So this is like the most classical yoga philosophy. The 1st one is Ethical Considerations. So it's how do we reduce suffering within our community to have more health and wellness and more ease and peace than our relationships?
The 2nd is Personal Practices. So how do you take care of your body? How do you take care of your home to have more ease in your relationships and more inner peace. The 3rd one is like the poses those are called Costinha. That's the yoga word for the poses, and that's to make your body strong and healthy. The 4th part is very specific breath work exercises, and we call that panayama and I say that word because I want to get back to that prana in Sanskrit. So the language of yoga is actually the same concept as the ancient Hebrew concept of rules or spirit and breath from the Old Testament. So I definitely want to get back to that one. The 5th part is this concept of being able to focus inward. We call that patty a horrid and yoga, and it means withdrawing the senses inward, which is basically what we do when we work for centering prayer or take time to go into stillness in the Christian philosophy. And then the last two practices, so this is the sixth and the seventh part are mindfulness and meditation. So those kind of go together and then the eighth practice, of course, as everyone knows, is like eternal bliss And, you know, union with the divine at all times becoming enlightened,

Carla Long

Of course, which everyone just basically gets, too. Of course, everyone's

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, I mean, last week, pretty much, but

Carla Long

Yeah, I mean, it happens, but it does happen. I am. I had no idea that there was so much in yoga. I'm I'm actually kind of shocked. So do you want to jump back into pranayama? Now, hell is a little bit more about that.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, absolutely pranayama. Pranayama are very specific breath work exercises that come to us from the yoga tradition. And they are designed specifically to move energy within the body in very specific ways. So, like if you're feeling really tired, there a specific breath work exercises to help boost your energy and boost vitality and kind of move blood around. If you're feeling really distracted their specific breathing exercises to help you calm and focus the mind. And then, if you're feeling really stressed, their specific breathing exercises to help you calm down. And the greatest thing about this is like this is a very physical thing. It's measurable, It's re-searchable and their studies designed right now that are showing the amazing physiological on biological benefits like in the medical world from these yoga breathing exercises. Reducing your heart rate, stabilizing blood pressure, lowering pain, reducing inflammation all sorts of incredible healing benefits come from these pranayama on the practices, which is really short practices five minutes about 5 to 6 times a day. Or there's a new study out that says, a lot of these benefits are come from 12 minutes after just five sessions breathing. So basically, the whole thing about yoga is how do I heal my mind? How do I give my body? How do I heal my spirit that I can live with greater meaning and greater depths? And there's eight ways to do it according to yoga, right? So it's a whole architecture that I think that's the framework for your life being a spiritual practice itself.

Carla Long

Oh, absolutely. It sounds like it does. Is that what kind of the feedback that you get from your students when you're teaching? Do you hear that from them?

Lisa Ash Drakard

A big part of my teaching on a big part of my ministry is self care as a spiritual practice. It's really the bedrock for healed communities, I think. So when it comes to my students. Well, first of all, I had to have yoga. Students were just kind of learned the yoga philosophy. But then I also work one on one therapeutically with private clients who are healing from specific injuries, specific surgeries or procedures or specific illnesses. But what we see over and over again there. This is just an ancient technology for helping us orient our life around self care. And, as you know and as I know, like people who are healthy are happier. People who are not in pain make more compassionate, more gracious choices.

Carla Long

This is This is really cool to hear. I'm really enjoying hearing this. So if someone wanted to, is listening to you and thinking, Oh my gosh, I desperately need this in my life. How do they start learning about it, or how do they start doing it?

Lisa Ash Drakard

My first piece of advice is to actually start with the breath work piece. The pranayama practices pretty much because they're accessible to everyone, right? The breath is free. The breath is our meaning of is our connection to life. And I think that in my experience it's the most profound, the most like potent part of the yoga philosophy. So actually do on my website have quite a few like audio guided meditations of audio guided breath work or pranayama exercises. Honestly, they're all over YouTube as well, so that would be a great be stories. And then my second piece of advice is to find a therapeutic yoga teacher just like any practice, you can do it with any intention. So you may find a yoga teacher who has a very deep spiritual connection to the yoga philosophy that you can learn from where you might find a yoga teacher in your community who's just more interested in the poses or the Austin as or the sequins. And it might be a good resource too, but if you're really looking for the philosophy, find unauthentic teacher, find someone who can give you feedback and that you can learn from. But I always think starting with the breath work is what's most important and most potent because you know, you could do the poses all day long. You can be a gymnast and still not be enlightened.

Carla Long

And your breath is always with you an

Lisa Ash Drakard

Your breath is always with you.

Carla Long

Always there, and you mentioned your website. Could we tell our listeners what that is?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, my website is just lisaashyoga.com and the page on there that will have quite a few resource is called guided meditations, but the website itself just has a wealth of resource is and a short, manageable articles and blogged posts about how this ancient philosophy effects and informs our daily self care practices and on mindfulness really a good little resource there, hopefully to get you started. But then, of course, we can look for your own teacher as well.

Carla Long

Sure, so that's lisaashyoga.com so I don't know if if this is the direction you want to go or not. But one of the questions I usually ask on the Holy Grounds series is how does this doing this practice. Change your change your day and you do it every day. I'm assuming because you have students, but I'm curious about how it could change your day. How, if you know any stories or anything about how people have been different or changed because of what they've done?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Something that's interesting that I hear from some of my students is a new awareness about their own goodness that they've learned through a dedicated yoga practice. There's so much, I think, in our materialistic kind of contemporary culture that tells us that we're not good enough. And even some students who come to me who are, kinda of consider themselves post

religious have picked up this idea from their families, their community is even from their spiritual practices like that. Their body is not good, and this practice really teaches us to inhabit our physical body and care for our physical body and note that what we put in really matters. So that's one way. I think that yoga, as a spiritual practice, can inform your day just go, creating the sense of self love and self care. I know for me, yoga has been incredibly healing on a body level in a self image level. I've learned to really, really care until listen to my body and rest when I need to rest and not overwork, which is my tendency, right? So I think, first of all, just reaffirming the goodness of our bodies. This incredible gift that is always moving towards optimal health can be life changing for people. Um, and I hear that feedback from my students pretty regularly. And then, you know, the second big one that I hear from my students, how yoga changes their day. The second most prominent thing is that they're just less stressed. Having a moment to reset, having one dedicated our where your entire job is to be present and not be in two places at once or not be distracted or fragmented is the most incredible gift you can give yourself, I think. And even just for some of my students, just imagining that they could be relaxed or that they could feel present is such a mind shift that their entire day starts to change from there. You know, I see a lot of my clients at the end of the day, I see a lot of my clients after they get off work, and a lot of my clients have helping jobs. Their on the front lines. They're working in the nicu. They're working in the community rehabilitation programs. They're working in public schools. They're working in the E. R. They're providing health care. No, they're working with their own come clean or psychology clients who are coming to them for mental health. They need a space, I think, to just reset, and you're just like, set aside any of the stress or all the daily stuff that we pick up from talking about other people like that just isn't really ours.

Lisa Ash Drakard

You know, if you have a stressful encounter with someone at work like, it's kind of hard to put that down. It's hard to let that go right and yoga class. We're always saying, Just let it go. You'll be here with your breath. Everything else can wait outside the door. It's like a time out. I mean, you're a mom sometimes, like you just need a time out to regroup and really assess what's important. And if you get your body to relax and not be in that constant state of stress. Really stress response. Um, that your whole day changes, right? You're more present. You're more compassionate.

Carla Long

You know, I hear that a lot on this on the Holy Grounds. series as after people do mindfulness or after people are intentional about spiritual practices. That's really what I hear. You're more compassionate. You're more kind. And I love that you use the word earlier you used the word, "goodness". People are more convinced of their own goodness because I really think that's what God wants us to be convinced of. God has said that we are good, and I once got into a very big argument with someone who I didn't, he didn't believe my philosophies, and I did not believe his and we realized that I thought that people were inherently good and he thought people were inherently not good. And I was like, There are people who think that Oh, my gosh. But I mean, I do think it takes work to remind ourselves of that. So I love that intentional part of yoga and different spiritually practices that reminds us of that.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, it's amazing. So in yoga, that's and actually it's a very specific philosophy, what you just described, and the word for that is ottoman and in yoga. The philosophy is based around this world viewer, this cosmology that all of this, like every single person, is just one unique manifestation of the inner light that connects and unites and sustains all of life. And that is inherently beautiful. And so, in yoga, we call that inner light like the one that's inside of you. We call it your Ottoman. It's basically your soul, and everything we're doing in yoga is trying to get you back to that connection with that soul with that Ottoman with that inner light. That's why this practice this is around. That's why it's so life changing because sometimes, like nothing else matters, things that we thought were really, really important before yoga practice an hour later. Not that important, like everything can wait while we take care of ourselves and take care of our families.

Carla Long

Yeah, I can imagine. You know, there are times when I get into, like, this horrible rhythm in my head and like this circular place, it's like, what are people thinking about me? What am I trying to do to help what people are thinking about me and I just can't get out of that cycle. And it sounds like something like practicing yoga or meditation or mindfulness are all the things that you're describing. Basically, just break that cycle and gets you out of your own head, which we desperately need, I desperately need sometimes.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, absolutely. That's one reason why I'm a walking meditation, right? Is helpful. Why yoga is a body practice just exactly what you said. I think sometimes we're stuck in like a vertical theology. You know, we're always moving into this mind space and yoga is a very, very direct move away from a vertical theology. It is inherently about the body. It's about grounding in the body. Um, that's why the poses are important, right? Because, like where I placed my left foot, it matters where my foundation is. It matters where my values and my motivations for acting are in this world like that all matters because it's where I put my left foot on the yoga mat. So we get to use our bodies as a foundation for the sense of finding goodness and meaning instead of just being caught in our heads, which half the stuff we think isn't true anyway, right?

Carla Long

It's, you're absolutely right or nobody cares.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Or nobody cares, absolutely.

Carla Long

We think everyone's carrying and nobody really cares at all, actually, which is freeing and kind of sad all of the same time. Um yeah. Life check. Yes. So earlier when you were talking about the eight parts of yoga you talked about mindfulness and meditation and you just, like, kind of threw them together a little bit. But I've heard maybe that they're different. But then, you

know, like we say mindfulness and meditation usually just interchangeably. But can you talk a little bit more about that and tell us a little bit more?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, absolutely. The easiest way to remember that is that mindfulness is a bedrock skill that helps you develop the practice of formal meditation. So I always think about it like I have to know my letters before I can read a paragraph. Right. So mindfulness that can be very formal, such as a formal walking meditation. Mindfulness is a mind set that can be used in like chanting. Um, or it could just be in everyday activities. Can just be the minds that of being present in whatever you're doing. The most classical examples, of course, are washing dishes, carrying water, being present, body mind and spirit in one place. And that's a skill that you can develop right. You can practice mindfulness by being fully present in the conversation. With a friend. You can practice mindfulness by the way, you tie your shoes. You can practice mindfulness in all areas of your life. It's a skill that you develop. Meditation is more of a formal practice, right, but you have to be mindful in order to be able to sit with your thoughts. So in yoga, typically, meditation is silent. Not always, but typically it's typically done in a seated orientation. But if that's not possible for your body, you can do it in a lying down manner or in the chair, just whatever's comfortable for you. But meditation in the yoga philosophy is about noticed, seeing the thoughts in the mind, developing the role of the observer, so observing the thoughts and the mind and then choosing which thoughts are most helpful in your healing process, and which thoughts are just thoughts like that don't really matter or they're not really true or that are purposefully causing you suffering like that. You just don't need it anymore. So you really need to be mindful as a skill in order to have a successful meditation practice. And so those are the last the limbs that you were mentioning. That's part sixth in part seven, the 8th one of course being, you know, eternal enlightenment and peace.

Carla Long

Of course, of course. Oh, that's really interesting. And they actually very helpful. So we really should not be using mindfulness and meditation interchangeably at all, because they are very different things.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah. I don't know. Depends on who you are. Um, they're definitely connected. They're not synonymous, but, you know, they need each other to work.

Carla Long

Interesting. That's very cool. So you are so knowledgeable about this. Lisa, I thank you so much for being on the podcast. Thanks so much for talking about this. Where did you get started with this? Have you always been into yoga, or was it something you kind of fell into? Tell us just a little bit about how you're into this.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah. I actually started teaching yoga in 2008. I discovered yoga first. When I was in high school, I was a dancer. I would say I had to be a yoga teacher. I was a dancer and I grew up with pastors

in my household. Um, so combining, you know, my love for spiritual practice and we're creating compassionate communities with my love for movement was really a nuptial stuff for me. I went to Graceland University in Lamoni Iowa and I started teaching dance, um, the one movement studio right in this town, and there they had yoga, pilates and dance. And so I began studying with the yoga teacher's there who were my bosses of an intern, and I completed my first teacher training program even before I graduated college. So it really was my first career. Um, and I've been teaching now for almost 12 years, really, where I started finding my niche, though, was in bringing together spiritually healing and physical healing from an anatomy based like very specific, alignment based methodology. I study with an organization called the Yoga Medicine and Yoga Medicine is an organization that empowers yoga teachers to work, doesn't adjunct for healing with a client's other health care professionals. So I'm what's called a yoga medicine therapeutic specialist, and my specialty is meeting somebody who is. I'm looking for you. So maybe recovering from an auto immune disorder, healing a specific injury after joint replacement procedure after a life change like pregnancy, for instance, meeting these people where they're at and giving them the yoga tools from all aspects of the yoga philosophy. So the breath work opposes the meditation, the spiritually apart and then working with their health care providers to kind of come up with a healing protocol for them. That just leads to greater wholeness and greater meaning on all levels. So it's a little bit like a physical therapists, but I get to talk about God and spirit all the time.

Carla Long

That sounds pretty wonderful.

Lisa Ash Drakard

It's the best thing in the world.

Carla Long

Yeah, and it sounds like you really, really do love it.

Lisa Ash Drakard

I love it, I love it

.

Carla Long

Is it a 40 hour a week job for you, or is it just?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Oh I own my own business, so it's like an 80 hour weeks.

Carla Long

Oh, right, yes, you keep busy on, and hopefully you take time for yourself.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, and I'm just so lucky that I work every single day and like the least stressful environment possible, right? I go to work every day in a yoga studio.

Carla Long

That's true. Even though books probably call your name to books and keeping accounting and all that yuckiness.

Lisa Ash Drakard

I don't do math. Carla.

Carla Long

Oh, my bad.

Lisa Ash Drakard

That's your job.

Carla Long

That's true. I do love it. Well, that's really cool. I I didn't realize that you worked with with doctors and and like the holistic kind of healing. I think that that sounds sounds really wonderful.

Lisa Ash Drakard

I had to really specialized practice and listeners. If you are interested in yoga medicine, you can go online. The website is yogamedicine.com, and there's a great search feature on this website where you type in either your city name or yours, the code and a listing of all the yoga medicine. Therapeutic specialists in your area will be available to you. So if you're looking for someone who has a specialist in final therapeutics like I am, or Shoulder Therapeutics or my own fashion release like, that's something that you could find and reach up to that specialist as well

Carla Long

Oh, that's pretty cool. That's really cool. What was it? Yogamedicine.com?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yep, Yoga medicine.com.

Carla Long

Cool. So if people are interested, are there other? Any resource is other Resource is that you would suggest that they have a look at books to read or podcast to listen to our other websites that you have found particularly helpful if people just want to dip their toe in first before jumping all the way in.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Absolutely. There's an app that's called Insight Timer, which is what I suggest as your first stop. It has thousands of audio guided meditations, and it's available for iPhone and Android. And then my other resource is I'm still a book girl. I'm not on the Internet, maybe as much as most people. So anything by Jack Cornfield. He's one of the leading meditation teachers in the

country and then, of course, anything by Sharon Salzberg, another leading meditation teacher. If you're interested in just learning a little bit more about the yoga, spite of this there's a really great book by a teacher, Rolf Gates, it's called Meditations From the Mat, and it's 365 days short, assessable reading and meditations about the eight lens of yoga or the 80 parts of yoga. That's a really great place to start. But of course. Get a teacher, get a teacher, get a teacher. Everything that can be learned from an expert is worth it.

Carla Long

Yeah, I mean, it really sounds like it sounds like if you decide to do this, then do it right, you know, and do it in a way that is gonna make a difference in your life. Not just a shallow difference in your life, but it sounds like you could make some pretty incredible moves forward in life if you do it, right.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Absolutely. Yeah.

Carla Long

Well, this has just been enlightening for me. I mean, I haven't reached quite enlightenment yet, but maybe Lisa, if you and I talked for another hour, I might get there. No wonder your students would love to come to you! Well, thank you again for being here. Is there anything that you wanted me to ask you in the podcast that I did not ask you or something else that you want to make sure and say before we sign off?

Lisa Ash Drakard

Um, no, I don't think so.

Carla Long

Just find a teacher and jump in. Yeah. Give it a try.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah, give it a try.

Carla Long

Well, thank you so much, Lisa. This has been awesome. I've learned so much, and I appreciate you taking the time.

Lisa Ash Drakard

Yeah. Thanks for listening, Carla.

Josh Mangelson

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