

## wHolistic!™ - Yoga and PD: Wellness Without Limits - Matthew Sanford

Indu Subramanian: --had to face over his life as well so, welcome Matthew

Matthew Sanford: It's an honor to be here.

Indu Subramanian: Thanks so much for joining us from Minnesota. So maybe just welcome us into the space and we can just get a sort of practice going with just grounding maybe and entering the space since it's all been a little hectic today for everyone involved.

Matthew Sanford: Everyone's running around for sure. Honored to be with you all. I want to start with just a grounding practice. As your body's changing a lot-- this is true for anybody--anyone living in a body--perhaps the most important sensation that you should repeatedly practice is the sensation of grounding. Now and I don't just mean with your mind. And one of the things that yoga is teaching is not just to focus your mental awareness, but to start to explore the idea of being able to focus your whole mind body, being able to move in a more coordinated movement, . And that starts with grounding. So I want you to do-- and I'm going to back up a little so you can see. One of the things is obviously sit up straight and tall, so feel your sitting. I'm in a wheelchair, you're like-- that's me wheeling back and forth. I'll show more as the thing-- I'll tell you a little bit more about my story. I want you to try to be equal sitting bones and at the same time, I want you to feel each foot, especially each heel so don't necessarily be leaning back in your chair if you can be a little bit forward and then notice that, I want to practice in this grounding. I want you to practice so your brain feels symmetrical experience. I'm having one hand on each leg too, so on top of each knee. I'm taking time to feel--not just calm my mind down, but to let there be more input into my brain coming equally from both sides of the body. Feel each foot on the floor, or if you're in a wheelchair on your footballs like I am. Feel where each sitting bone is. Feel the lift, feel it down a little with your sitting bones and gently lift up from your lower abdomen up. Notice where the tip of each shoulder is, the space between each ear and each shoulder, and start to let yourself go inward. I want you to have a full body presence in this centering. Close your eyes from top to bottom if you're comfortable doing that. And again keep letting the symmetry from side to side. As you sit here and are quiet for a little bit you're doing so with the more active vibrant sensation through your whole body. Notice the breath into each nostril, into each lung. Keep your consciousness in each sitting bone and the bottom of each foot. Allow. The sensation of allowing is really important in yoga. Allow and open to equalness in your body but also a balance between what's inside of you and what's outside of you. You have two parts of your nervous system one that's more interoceptive and one that's more proprioceptive and you want to learn to balance both, stopping each temple, each jaw, the inside of your mouth. Keep your lips together and your teeth slightly apart But. keep a lift up, a rising up through the chest as you allow your presence to stay grounded. [silence] You might notice the different sounds in your house. There's a lot going on in your house even if you're by yourself. [silence] Good. And then release. I'm coming back forward. One of the things--especially if your body is changing asymmetrically-- that you want to practice as a sensation is symmetry between sides of your body. And that'll affect sides of your brain too. That sensation of symmetry is one of the real simple takeaways that I want you to bring out of this session, is that that's going to matter. And it doesn't mean you have to practice symmetry while you're walking or while you're trying to do really hard things. It means it's a sensation that can happen in your ordinary sitting, let's say. All right so that's just a grounding practice. I'm going to tell you-- unless you-- I'll start talking-- sometimes you have a question.

Indu Subramanian: Yeah I think it would be great to teach us a little bit about your background, about your journey, where you are, what you do to help people everyday.

Matthew Sanford: Yeah, yeah. I'm a yoga teacher right. I'm also an author. I wrote a book called *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*. And what happened to me is, I was a 13

year old kid, very athletic, running around, and I was-- my whole family was in a car accident, and my father and sister were killed. And I went through-- and my mother and brother were not physically injured, but I went through a shredder. I broke my neck at C1, which didn't kill me, thank goodness. If that had broken badly, I wouldn't be able to breathe. I broke my back at T-456 I got thrown from the car, so I caught myself and broke both my wrists. I filled a lung with fluid, but I also sustained an injury to my pancreas that left me unable to eat for nearly 60 days. So I went from 119 pounds to 79 pounds in less than 60 days. I was being fed through the neck, and I was in a coma for three and a half days, and I literally went to sleep snuggled up with my sister in the back of a car and woke up to a completely different life. And for the longest time, for the first 12 years before I started yoga, I followed the rehabilitation vision, which would be to use your will to overcome whatever my disability like and learn--. So basically, I was guided to become really strong with my upper body. And over time I kind of became a floating upper torso and learned to drag my paralyzed body through my life. Now this is a vision of an approach to a changing body that I want to try to undo. One of the first reactions when you get a new diagnosis or a new life event where your life is changed, you think, well if I just will my way through it if I just hunker down, grip my teeth, hold my breath, and push, I'll overcome my disability. I want you to know I'm a yoga teacher exactly because I'm disabled, because I live in an altered mind-body relationship. And all of you on this call are on a frontier of what it is to live in a body because it's changing. They don't quite understand all the things are happening with Parkinson's, but you're in an altered mind-body relationship, and rather than that making you less of a yogi, in my opinion, it makes you more of a potential yoga student because you are going to be exploring how to live fully in a body despite not being able to move in the ways that you're accustomed to. I think this is a big insight. You're actually in my opinion-- for what I think is the heart of yoga-- I think that you are in a position where you can be a better yoga student than if you didn't have physical limitations and changes because you're going to start to get and have to explore the relationship of your inner experience to your outer experience and the balance between the two whereas someone that's "able-bodied." Just think it's all about the movements that somehow yoga is about being able to take your leg behind your head or being able to touch your toes or all those things and so I want to redefine what yoga is in your mind. Yoga is bringing more awareness rather than less to movement--asana is yoga poses. It's being able to inhabit your whole body and breathe while doing so, like learning to spread to the outer edges of your body. So let's just think about it for a second. I don't have sensation below my point of injury, so I don't feel myself tapping on my legs right now. Does that mean I don't have access to my whole mind-body relationship because my spinal cord was severed? The answer is no, I do. It turns out that the nervous system and why I'm so excited to work with Indu, I should call you very last name but I've known her as Indu, why I work with her is that there's the potential for sensation through your entire body, even though parts of the mechanism of your normal mind-body relationship are changing. And they don't know exactly all the causes of Parkinson's, but I do know it's altered and I do know our nervous system is so robust and our human consciousness in a body is so robust. There are going to be ways for you to live in your whole body even though you're physically becoming whatever it means to become less able or less coordinated. And that's what I want to talk to you about: why yoga is so important or some sort of mind body practice. It's really important that you keep extending out to the outer edges of your body. And this is something that happens with anyone that ages, is you tend to pull away from the outer edges and don't live in your whole body as much And that's something that, as with someone who lives with a disability, that that habit is something that ends up happening more and more because you worry about falling, you worry about all these other things. You stop extending out through your whole body. So everyone, I want everyone to sit up straight, up and tall again. And again, there's ways to like live in your whole body without challenging it so much that you're maybe going to fall. I want you to feel your sit bones in your feet again but stretch your arms down. I want you to be active with the arms going down and simultaneously

lift under the collar bones and as you lift on the collar bones, drop the shoulder blades down the back body, feel your sitting bones and down to your feet with active arms. Take a couple of breaths. Inhabit the whole vessel. That's the kind of message I want to get across to you: you don't have to be doing risky things for your situation to practice yoga. You need to go deeper inward into poses and feel it more. Again, your arms go down, and getting that lift under the collar bones, and it's really important that you practice moving in multiple directions. Lift under the collar bones and get down through your sitting bones and extend from your inner groin down to your inner knee and down to your heel, so you get a multi-directional work in your body, and you breathe. Inhabiting the vessel-- one of the biggest lessons of my life is-- and then release-- is that it's my birthright to live in my whole body. and that transcends the condition I live with. It just means I have to work at it a little bit. It just means I have to explore and that's the spirit I want to leave you all with too, is explore this mind-body relationship that you have because one of the truths I've come to realize is that my body is and always will be the best home my mind will ever have, even if my body's not doing what I want it to do. When my mind gets disconnected from my body, I'm more subject to anxiety, to depression, to a whole bunch of things. I need to live in the only body I ever get to have. And I know it's really hard when you have your life your mind-body relationship changing due to the condition you're living with, and it's easy to think that your body's let you down. I don't think so. It's one of the big learnings for me. And I can talk a little bit about my story. What happened to me is that I did this vision of will, willfully pushing through my body trying to outrun my disability or prove that it didn't matter. For 12 years I did that, and I just missed my body incredibly badly, and I just wanted to find a way to live in my whole body. And I found from that [inaudible] a whole bunch of really good things started to happen as I started to try to inhabit in my body. I started to get curious again. I started to want to explore. I didn't want to just hang out with the judgment of like, dang look what it's changing. And it started to bring a realization to me, which was that my body is what stays faithful to living. You know, I'll tell you a little bit about some experiences I had. With every ounce of energy, your body, my body, will always move towards living. That's what it does. It doesn't ask for what happened to it. It didn't ask for the car to bounce over my chest. It didn't ask for me to break as many bones. But it kept me living. And what I did as a 13 year old boy in the hospital, because the violence didn't end at the accident scene-- it began and it saved my life, a lot of what the doctors had to do when I was in acute care. But what I learned to do at that time was to separate from my body and merge with the lights overhead as things were happening to my body and the story of my book is the story of that saved my life at the time, but it's not a long-term strategy, and what I want to get across to you is that even while your body's changing and being frustrated, the best long-term strategy you have is to try to live in your body as deeply and as profoundly as you can, and there's going to be a lot of benefits that come from that. It doesn't mean if I think I'm doing yoga because I'm going to try to reverse my paralysis, that somehow yoga is going to make me be able to walk and do all the things, that's not going to sustain me. I do yoga, and I do I have a mind body practice because I want to inhabit the only body I'm ever going to have, and I want to honor my body even as it's changing, even as I'm frustrated. And we all know when you live with the condition aren't some days better than others some days it just is really hard to live through your day, other days are better. That's normal, it's not like I'm Joe Happy all the time, I'm not. Living with a disability, living with a chronic condition sucks, that's just the truth. But what I find is that when I live and can live more vibrantly through my whole body, my world gets brighter. I get more connected. You ever seen really happy people? Do they go around like with their chest dropped and all scrunched down with rank? No, that's not what happy people do. The ability to expand in your mind-body relationship, to take up more space, even when you're more worried about your movements, this is crucial. This means that yoga can happen not just when you're trying to stand up. It should happen in your bed. It should happen in your chair. It should happen all over the place. And that's what I specialize in. I teach people from all over the world how to teach people that live with altered mind-body

relationships. I try to show people that live with certain conditions that actually the heart of yoga has nothing to do with whether you can stand up and take your feet four feet wide and your arms wide. It has something to do with more direct and [inaudible]. And that's the thing where, whether it's yoga or something else, I want you to inhabit your mind body relationship. I want you to do that while breathing. Keep it simple. It doesn't have to be super really complex. So let's just do another yoga pose. One of the core principles of yoga poses is that in order to raise up-- some of you are working on being able to still stand, in order to go up, something has to go down. The principle that we teach in our trainings is "down to go up." Now this simple idea is not simple at all when you have an alternate mind-body relationship, but the principle of being able to go down to go up is actually something that you can practice, and it is happening every time you try to stand up. So now I want you again sit up straight and tall. I want you to notice something and I want you to try to press down. And I know one side of your body might be working better than the other, but I want you to feel each sitting bone, and try to extend awareness--not just a physical action--from your inner groin to your inner knee and then down through your inner heel. But as you do, I want you to hit down through your sitting bones and lift up to your chest. I want you to activate down through your legs in order to rise up through your core. Okay so just do that and take a breath. If you have to breathe, you can breathe through your nose, great. If it's through your mouth, that's fine. But now on your next inhalation I want you to take your left arm up over your head. I don't care if it only comes up this far [gesturing]. I don't care if it's hard to do, just do it. But now as you stretch up, I want you to hit down through your sitting bones and drop your shoulder blade down as you stretch your arm up. Take a couple of breaths. Good, and then release. Take your other arm up. Hit down through your sitting bones, stretch up beyond your fingertips, drop your shoulder blades down and straighten your arms, feel your legs. Good, and then release. Another thing I want some of you to start practicing more is practicing being aware from one side of your body to the other, because I know you're asymmetrical in having things being affected. I want you to inhale and take your left arm up again, but I want you to be more aware of your right sitting bone and your right foot, so you're being aware on one side of your body as you stretch up through the opposite side, good. And then take your arm around, and then we do the same thing on the other side. We're going to go up on one side and press down on the opposite side so the right arm goes up. I'm more aware of my left hip and right down through my left inner heel. I'm practicing from side to side. And then release. Hopefully you feel a little bit of that buzzing feeling from working. Breathe into the fatigue. Don't try to overwhelm, just take a couple of breaths into that fatigue. What I want you to get is that the principles of yoga, they don't discriminate. The things that make the yoga poses possible don't discriminate. Yoga poses do. So if I were to ask you to do a headstand right now, if you had asked me to do a headstand, I can't do headstand. I can't. I can't go upside down on my head. That's okay. That's not the only thing that I need to be able to do. I need to understand how poses work from the inside to the out. I need to inhabit the vessel that I live in every day and see where it takes me, and I guarantee you it's going to improve your strength balance and flexibility. But your body's going to keep changing, so it's new every day, and some days are going to be better than others. It's important for you to recognize that-- don't just think about your actions. I want to show you a way of moving in your body that can go with you through the whole course of your disease, not just a whole bunch of actions that you can't get to anymore. Like if you were to tell me to stand up and do yoga, I would think I could never be a yoga student. If you were to show me how the poses work and how to activate, that's going to carry through no matter what happens with me, and that's the level I want you to get. I want to do one other thing-- there's one other principle-- and then we'll go up for questions and stuff and start. I've got a lot of things to say as you can kind of tell because this is what I do every day. I try to help people live in the body they have regardless of what's happening to it. So there's down to go up, but then there's also in to go out. A yoga pose is going to make you do-- you're trying to balance from what's inside of you to what's outside. I want you to sit up straight and tall

and try to be more aware of the space in the center of your sternum. Well actually first don't worry about that for a second. I just want you to sit up and just turn your head to the left like someone's calling, like not a big deal. [inaudible] Just kind of notice when you just move your head. But now I want you to anchor it. I want you to have your chin in the center and be more aware of the center of your sternum. And now I want you, this first time, as you turn your head to the right, I want you to stay steady in the center of your chest, so it's not just your chin that's moving, it's from here up. So you turn and notice the changes in your shoulder blades when you anchor here. And then come back to center. And then again centering from the center of the chest, turn your head to the left so it becomes much more connected. Good, and then come on back to center. Now can you tell that when, instead of just turning your head to the side like you might normally do in the course of your normal day, when you anchor here, can you tell that you can feel your legs better? When you ground an action, you will feel your whole body better. Again, going the first way, I'm going to anchor here. Now I'm going to put my consciousness here. I'm going to go in but I'm going to feel my sitting bones and my inner heels at the same time, and then my whole body's going to turn my head to the right, breathing in my whole body, feeling my whole body, grounded in my whole body. And then back to center do it while keeping length in your whole spine again. I'm going to anchor here, I'm going to feel my sitting bones, I'm going to drop my shoulder blades, I'm going to feel my feet on the floor, and I'm going to turn my head. I want you to get a whole-body workout without taking on the risk of gravity, and then come on back to center. Full-bodied movement with breath is what I want you to practice, and it's going to make your mind get clearer. It's going to do some other things. All right, so I got more to teach at the end, but that's kind of a quick-fire hose of living in your body even though it's changing.

Indu Subramanian: Yeah absolutely. I think a lot of these things are very helpful to our patients. There are people living with Parkinson's and even some of their caregivers that are at home, too, that are currently stuck often indoors due to social distancing. I think a couple of questions that people have had-- and I think you've already got some great comments here-- so it sounds like this sort of getting comfortable with your body as it is and sort of accepting the place that you're coming from there when we have patients that we give the diagnosis of Parkinson's to-- I think it is a dramatic diagnosis to get. And often I feel like at the beginning, there's a sense that people are fighting almost with the diagnosis, and then there's a sort of acceptance and then a transformation moving forward. And there's sometimes, you would mention the sort of fighting with the body side that may not be moving as well and sort of sometimes favoring that side and overworking the other side and trying to kind of push through it. I think part of having this diagnosis and as people accept it and then move forward and get this energetic sort of shift where we've had a number of patients that have really been speaking about the sort of energy that they get from helping others and sort of a pivot with their mental framework to thinking about things in a more positive way. Do you have any-- because I know, Matthew, that I've seen videos and you've told me about experiences where you've literally worked with people at the time of a spinal cord injury, or something where they suddenly go from being, let's say a very agile dancer for example-- I think I saw in a video-- to suddenly having a lack of movement that's so dramatic overnight. I know you work with those people day in and day out. What are the tactics that you're able to use, or the pearls that you're able to give us to help with that frameshift?

Matthew Sanford: Yeah so in the early part, like when you first get the diagnosis, it's natural to have a little bit of denial or to think you're going to beat it or going to overcome it, and that's natural and that's just a phase. It's an important phase, it's like saying, "hey I don't like what's going on." But one of the things that I want to-- when I got to acceptance-- I don't want you to accept too much. I want you to honor that you have Parkinson's and that it's going to change your life and your body may be changing, but I don't want you to accept that I don't get to live in this body that I have. And I know a lot of your identity is tied into the things you do within our

culture, whether you can get up and go to the grocery store or do this and do that. A lot of us have had an identity that's very much dependent on our ability to be physically active, and so that stuff may be changing over time, but I don't want you to accept that there isn't a way for you to live vibrantly in the body you do have. So when someone's first injured, when I'm working with someone, there's this natural tendency for human beings to want to go and heal as a reversal. Like go back to when your body was before you started to have the signs of Parkinson's, for example, and try to think that that's healing. And that's a phase you have to be patient and kind to yourself about because it's natural. Anyone notice that your family members really want that for you? It's your family members that are afraid of your suffering as much as you are, or people close to you. There's a phase of that that I think is just natural, and to try to fight against that is too hard, but what acceptance means in my opinion is that you're going to have to get curious. Your condition is going to make you have to get curious about how you're going to live actively in your body. I think there's a strength in being able to accept the truth of your condition in the situation you're living in, on one level. And on another level saying, "but I'm to stay awake and I'm going to stay active and I'm going to do what I can do and I'm going to live as vibrantly as I can." Because all of our bodies are changing, by the way. That's an inevitable arc of living, or accelerator into your changing mind-body relationship called Parkinson's. But it's a situation that we all have to live with, and so the will to keep exploring your mind-body relationship is where I want your real strong strength to go, not in just fighting against the diagnosis, but you have to be patient with yourself. I have a whole bunch of students with ALS, which is more acute in a lot of cases, and at first they try to work out more and lift their weights, like lift weights and try to figure out how to beat ALS. Well, you're not going to be able to lift your weights to beat ALS, but that's a natural phase. I think both you and your support system have to accept without getting smaller, I'm talking metaphorically obviously.

Indu Subramanian: Yep and you use words like vibrancy, which I think is pretty important. I think the sort of energetic kind of keeping the dream alive, and that happiness and the big not getting smaller is absolutely important. There's been a few questions here in the chat already. One is about, with Parkinson's a lot of our patients face things like apathy and fatigue and pain. Somebody [inaudible name] asks, "If my body wants to live, why is it hard to get off the couch and get moving? Is that my mind getting in the way? What is your take on the PD symptoms of apathy, fatigue, and pain and overcoming them?"

Matthew Sanford: Well I think that those are very real and very difficult, and I think that as I'm learning from Indu about what's happening in Parkinson's in particular, I think you're set up for the apathy a little bit given the changes in the chemicals in your brain and all the things that are happening. So at first, I want to acknowledge that those are real things. But part of it is that returning to your body doesn't necessarily mean or have to mean returning to your life as you knew it. You might not be able to do all the same things. The apathy I think will be helped by inhabiting your body more actively and more vibrantly. To speak metaphorically, so you can't get off the couch, but I'm pretty sure you can do yoga on the couch. It's both a metaphor and literally, like look, I get that you don't want to do things, but you could be more focused in your breath. And one of the things why I practice yoga is that it can go anywhere with me. As a paraplegic-- and this is going to sound goofy-- I spend way more time in the bathroom than the natural human being. So much of my time is spent in maintaining my body and being able to help it. I have a lot of time in my life that I could either just be crestfallen by or I can take some of that time and figure out how to bring my yoga practice there, how to sit up straight and tall, be more aware of exhale. Yoga practice, remember, can happen on your couch. My point is for the person that's struggling with apathy, I believe that you need to keep it simple, and the less you move, the more apathy is going to take hold, so you have this kind of vicious circle. My point is don't think, "oh my god, I got to go exercise three times a week for 30 minutes." That's going to keep you on the couch. But you can sit up straight and tall, take a couple of breaths, soften the inside of your mouth, ground down to your feet, and then release again. Start the yoga practice

or start the mind-body practice wherever you are, and there will be a forward moment if you can break the lock of your brain. The key to practicing yoga at home-- and by the way practicing yoga at home is way harder than going to a class, like 95% of yoga practitioners don't practice at home, so I'm asking a lot. But when you start practicing, you don't even ask yourself, "Do I want to practice yoga?" You just do it, you try to take the [audio cuts out], you just go, "I'm just going to do it!" You don't ask yourself. When it comes to living vibrantly, your mind is like last to the party. [laughter] What I'm trying to get you to switch is try to go, "Wait maybe there's learning that my body can teach my mind. Maybe if I start living a little bit more actively and fully through my body, it'll start to reshape my mind." Instead of like making everything dependent, you're wanting to do it because that's what's gone off. The more that we can start a habit of body presence-- and start with two minutes a day, start with a few breaths, start with putting your hands and feet down before you eat dinner and take a breath and feel your whole body for a second and then go to eat dinner. There are places throughout your day where you can not have to confront the overwhelming presence of apathy that's coming through your mind-body relationship.

Indu Subramanian: Matthew, maybe we could do a breath practice or two that you find can be energizing a little bit to kind of get people kind of in that sort of forward motion.

Matthew Sanford: So the thing is, that this is where Indu and I don't-- she always wants to make everything default to your breath [laughter] and I'd rather have you live in your whole body and breathe, okay. But I get it, she's like asking me, she's like playing my cards for me here just for a second. I'll do that with her. I'll make it more of a breath practice.

Indu Subramanian: Whatever you want --

Matthew Sanford: Now no I'm smiling, I'm teasing you on purpose. Some of you don't have as easy time breathing, and that's okay. That's what I want to acknowledge. Even for you, that your breath practice could start by trying to breathe a few more times through your nose, or pay more attention to your exhale. Or if you're having to breathe through your mouth, notice the sensations of breathing where the expansion is. The best practice I want to do right now is just notice your inhalation, take a breath in. If you do it through your nose, great. But just notice the expansion of your ribs, let your inhalation nudge into your spine. What I like to say about this practice is if you think about what your rib cage is, think about it as the fingers of your spine, because your ribs come out of your spine. Think about your fingers of your spine are trying to caress your breath, so the intersection between your breath and your rib cage is the intersection between your spine and your breath. And most all of your life force is coming through your spine first, and your brain organizes it. On these next few breaths, I want you just to notice the nudge of the inhalation into your rib cage. And as you take the inhale notice how the awareness goes around your back body and goes right in. And let the exhalation just release-. On these next few inhalations, try to feel it as if you're breathing right into your spine. You feel not only the expansion of the inhalation, you start to feel your spine more. And then exhale and usually on the exhalation, you drop your chest, you get smaller. On this next inhalation inhale feel the expansion of your rib cage, keep that expansion, and exhale. Keep your chest lifted even through the exhale. On this next inhalation, inhale, expand, and then exhale, as if I'm pushing on the inner edge of each of your shoulder blades, and exhale from your back ribs from the inner edge of your shoulder blades. Inhale feel the expansion, and then exhale as if you're pushing from your inner shoulder blades forward on the exhalation. You're exhaling from your back body. And do that a couple times. Does anyone notice that when you exhale from your back ribs you have to sit up straighter? The expansion on the inhalation, the exhalation from the back inner edge of each shoulder blade, and notice there's a slight movement of the abdomen back towards the spine. Do that a couple more times, and notice that because there's a expansion in every direction, the exhalation from the back ribs elongates your spine. Hit down through your sitting bones and stretch out to the top of your head on the exhalation. Feel the breath into the rib cage and then exhale length into your spine. And by the way, elongating your

spine on exhalation is in almost every yoga pose. When you're doing more active stuff, you're exhaling and elongating the spine and the life force in your spine in almost every yoga pose. In this breath practice you're kind of doing what's at the hub of the wheel of every pose. There's an expansion on inhalation and an elongation on exhalation. Now this is exactly what we were doing when I said, "Inhale take your arm up." I was having you expand and take your arm up. And then exhale and extend into some length. All right, is that what you're hoping for?

Indu Subramanian: Very cool. So another question here. There's a question about when medication sort of wears off, and sometimes actually that's accompanied by some anxiety. People feel like they can't move quite as well. And with Parkinson's, as we talked about, there's a sort of fluctuation-- you talked about day-to-day fluctuations-- but a lot of our patients and the families that live with them are used to what they call "on," time where the pills are working well, and these sort of "off" times, and sometimes those "off" times when the pills aren't working well are unpredictable. If somebody gets into that, they often get anxious. They often feel kind of tight. Could you kind of help maybe with one or two--

Matthew Sanford: Yeah--

Indu Subramanian: Whatever you want, I won't even say breathwork.

Matthew Sanford: No, I'm laughing, no I'll follow your lead it's good.

Indu Subramanian: Anything that you could think of.

Matthew Sanford: Yeah so a couple different things. One of them is that there's already research that your exhalation activates the parasympathetic nervous system a little bit more, so the calming part of your nervous system. When you start feeling yourself agitated, be more aware of your exhale. Just as a habit, when you're trying to calm down--and it's metaphorical-- let go. Whatever it is agitating you, rising up in your head, let it go on exhalation. I want you to get better at letting go of mental content as you let go of your breath. Now this is a practice. You need to practice this, and not when you're full of anxiety. Don't always do your yoga practice when you're full of anxiety. When the anxiety comes you already have an established practice that you can default to, as opposed to try to do right there. That's one. In general anxiety-- if I were to talk about it more energetically-- anxiety pulls awareness out of your feet and draws it up towards the head. This is where grounding practices are going to be really important, when I said before dinner ground your hands and feet and just be grounded. Now what I want here, why I think grounding your hands and feet, the brain has a whole bunch of receptors in the thumb and a whole bunch of receptors in the big toe mounts and in the heels. Literally by grounding symmetrically your hands and your feet and taking a breath and exhaling, you're now getting the brain to be activated and the breath to be moving you towards your parasympathetic nervous system. Grounding hands and feet, and especially your feet, taking time-- and maybe it's as simple as wiggling your toes-- get body sensation down by your feet, when you're spiraling up in anxiety. Another one. Your frontal cortex is up here-- so I'm taking out my glasses. This is what we teach as a de-escalation strategy to people with traumatic brain injuries and all sorts of people that have trouble with anxiety. It's just literally putting reference on your forehead. Take your hand and put the heel of your hand right on the bridge of your nose and very lightly place your fingers lightly on your forehead, on the top of your head there. Already one of the things I want you to get better at is the practicing of soothing energy. Already when you do this, notice that it's soothing it right away. Start to pay attention to soothing, and then like moving tissue paper very slightly, move the skin on your forehead towards the bridge of your nose-- and your eyes are closed obviously-- but you're trying to ground your brain by touching the forehead. There's a little slight movement of the skin on the forehead towards the bridge of the nose, and then release. A real funny story-- we have one student that has surviving the traumatic brain injury and is driving again, and the one thing that she and her teacher did at mind body seasons was a lot of this [places hand on forehead again] because she couldn't understand everything that was going on all the time, she had trouble. And this became by far her favorite thing to do, and then Amy had the student report, "Well, when I'm driving, all of a



sudden I just try to drive my car with my hand and my forehead because I just need to calm down while I'm driving." But Amy is like, "Well, that's not so good you block your vision. You got to be careful here." But honestly, getting reference into the agitation--body reference, body awareness-- will calm your mind down. And that's the simple truth, whether it's grounding your hands and feet, whether it's feeling a sensation of grounding, being more aware of your exhale, what you're trying to do is have your brain take in more input from your body because guess what never leaves you in your entire life? Your body. Guess what guarantees presence in the present? Your body. Your body is a tremendous resource that, especially when you're living with Parkinson's, you have more need to be more actively utilizing the grounding of your body.

Indu Subramanian: Wow. I mean I think these practices are actually very beautiful even for people who don't have any real neurological dysfunction that we know of.

Matthew Sanford: They're life skills, that's the thing. All we're trying to do is show you life skills. It's not just for Parkinson's. Your body is a tremendous asset even if it's not doing what you want.

Indu Subramanian: Even these sort of grounding practices with using the sensory input from the floor, the table, these simple things, actually in this setting right now of social distancing where people probably are missing hugs. Matthew, I've talked a lot about the sort of tactile input that I love to send my patients to yoga class to sort of bond with the teacher and feel this experience. And some of the most beautiful things that you and I have talked about is even in two people sitting back to back and having that energy, and the energy between people-- people are missing that right now, and at home alone. And even when we can see each other, people have to wear masks and gloves, and when I see my whole team, we're all gloved and everything. It's just so disconnected, so I think these ways to have some tactile experience with grounding that one can have right here, right now actually is pretty helpful for any one of us and getting out of one's head and sort of literally getting out of one's head by feeling the floor, feeling the chair, feeling the space around with every ounce of our fingertips and every ounce of our tears is very helpful

Matthew Sanford: Yeah, being more aware of your skin for example. Your skin, like the air on your skin--there's a whole bunch of ways that your brain, if you ask it to cue into subtler sensations, it can do it because all those sensations are coming through you. They're usually just not paid attention to. It's not like you're creating something new. What you're trying to do is train your brain to listen to what's already there and to not get caught in the thought that you're having. I do want to say some things about how it is a different world that we live in as we're isolated more, but I also want you to know that there are different ways to connect outwardly. Remember one of the principles of yoga is to be able to connect what's inside to what's outside. There are some really-- I hope all of you listen to music. There's literally a sensual experience that something's coming from the outside and touching you, and then even if you move just a little bit in rhythm. Rhythm is also a really good thing to exercise your brain with. If you're sitting on the couch and having the apathy of not being able to get off your couch, move around a little bit. The more you stay static, the more your mind's going to be prone to anxiety. Getting input, getting rhythm, moving around a little bit, letting there be music singing out loud, join in and sing with the song you're listening to. There's research for people with trauma that singing in a choir really helps. Well you can sing along with whatever's going on, and that's also really good for your breath, when you sing. The other thing I'm going to tell you is figure out how to laugh. Laugh is a really good use of air. There are things that we need to do to connect more in the spaces we're living in. I also want you to get better at living in the house you have. Doing yoga, I'm leaning on a table here, reaching over for a chair here, putting your hands on the counter, putting on the table. Realize that you can use the support of the room around you, that that's part of what can become your yoga practice. I want you all to study the sensation of support because you're not getting the hugs right now, and I get that and it's lonely, but you can create reference. If you think about a little kid when he's hurt and runs to his mom,

it's not that he needs sympathy. He needs boundary again, the boundary of the mother's hug. You can find boundaries different ways, you can connect. And we have to take these things really seriously now because of being more socially isolated.

Indu Subramanian: This is beautiful. There's a lot of things in the chat. One is about your interview with Krista Tippett. People are referencing you and a lot of your offerings. People are asking about how they can start with this. They're kind of sold on the taste that you've given here. How can they move forward after this to maybe more?

Matthew Sanford: Yeah our nonprofit Mind Body Solutions since COVID started gives all of our online classes away for free. Go to [mindbodysolutions.org](http://mindbodysolutions.org) sign up. We offer right now a whole handful six or seven classes online. I teach every Monday at 10 o'clock, and I live in the Central Time Zone, but come to our classes, join that community. They'll all be chair classes, so again [mindbodysolutions.org](http://mindbodysolutions.org) and surf your way through that. We have a YouTube channel where we actually post some of our classes, like the one I taught last week I think just got posted. But if you go to onto Facebook-- not Facebook-- you go on to YouTube and type in "mind body solutions," you'll find what's called "The Hub." "The Hub" has got dropped classes that you can watch and "The Hub" has got a whole bunch of other videos seeing other people with disability talk about yoga, all these different things. What one of the great things about this new era is now everyone's getting better at accessing social media, and we have more content that's available to you that we've been making for a year now. That's another great way to enter this and also find some community. It's kind of cool when. In my class I have a guy from Sweden that comes, a guy from Spain that comes, someone from Brazil comes. It's a worldwide thing that's happening because we're all in the same boat. It's hard in every direction right now. That's why you do the little things. You don't worry about, "I can't do yoga because I can't stand up." No, you think smaller. You use your awareness and you realize that when you live in your body, you can touch everything. I'm telling you everyone needs to lift their chest more especially when you're socially isolated. This [puts hand on chest] needs to stay up and connected. This is the posture of disconnection from the world around you [slumping], this is where you can touch. I want you to get better at touching the world around you from the center of your chest. It's all possible. Our bodies are incredible and they're very connected, very very connected. I know we're at 2:59.

Indu Subramanian: We are, yes. Time, as we knew, would fly by. We'll have to have you back, Matthew.

Matthew Sanford: I'll come back any time I'll teach you classes. [crosstalk] [inaudible]

Indu Subramanian: Yeah we should just do a class

Matthew Sanford: Sometime I'll come in, and just come check us out.

Indu Subramanian: People have written, "You've had some great and inspirational speakers this year, but Matthew tops them all. You're amazing. Bring tears to my eyes." Somebody else wrote "Wow will do, also buying your book. I'm ready to change my life, sir, thank you." That's what somebody else wrote.

Matthew Sanford: Well the best interview I ever did was the one with Krista Tippett, so if you want to go to [onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org). I did it in 2008, 2007. It's called "The Body's Grace." And that's what I want to get to you guys. Your body's changing, but there's still an inner grace to it. There's still hope in it.

Indu Subramanian: Well I'm going to watch that and maybe we can do a part two, because I think that you have so much to share, Matthew. I'm so grateful to whatever connected us-- the world, the energy, the spiritual universe-- that has connected us. I feel so lucky to have you as honestly my current main guru, I guess in some ways, to guide me through this.

Matthew Sanford: This kind of insight can only be shared so I'd love to share with you okay.

Indu Subramanian: This is amazing, well thank you so much I really. Oh! Somebody's showing the Krista Tippett, maybe we just put it up, I'm not too sure what just happened there. But yes we will have everyone start at least getting tastes and then we will have a follow-up with you,

and hopefully Amy as well will be on soon. I'm going to be talking to her. Mind Body Solutions will blow your mind, folks. Just look at them, they're doing some amazing work with the VA. Luckily, we have them helping. I did a training with some recreational therapists at the VA who are learning this, and somebody asked about amputees. They're working with amputees. I was in a group class with people who work with amputees, a group class with some people who work with blind students, traumatic brain injured students, paralyzed-- just mind-blowing, the work that you guys are doing. I think as you mentioned, there is hope, there's grace, there's beauty around us, and we just have to connect. We have to kind of get that life force that is definitely in there within each of us and find a way to connect with each other and share the beauty. So thanks so much, Matthew. This is just the beginning of this conversation and many more,

Matthew Sanford: Well see you later

Indu Subramanian: And back to you guys to wave us out

Speaker 3: Thank you. Everybody I'm sure is leaving today very refreshed and energized, so thank you Matthew, thank you Dr. Subramanian. And everyone have a great rest of your Monday now.

Matthew Sanford: Thank you. Take care everybody.