

Degriefing[®]— An Interview with Lyn Prashant

—Interview by Alan Rhody

Lyn Prashant is an internationally recognized Somatic Health Educator, massage teacher/therapist, grief counselor, yoga teacher, health spa industry consultant, and story teller. She recently spent two years in Punta del Este, Uruguay, South America, where she founded the first holistic health spa and school of mind/body therapy, "Escuela Eco-Somatica."

Lyn has recently returned to the Bay Area to resume her teaching and private practice, working with individuals and families, using her unique mind/body approach dealing with illness, injury, and pain. She is also helping the AHP Perspective to expand by taking over as Advertising Manager. We are delighted to introduce her in both her professional role and her AHP helping role.

In 1983, she and her husband Mark went from Roswell Park Memorial Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York to the doors and hearts of the Living/Dying Project in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Mark died there eight months later, at 36, after consciously exploring the nature of both his healing into life and healing into death. Lyn was by his side during this deeply personal journey and, with Mark, had the opportunity to work with Stephen and Ondrea Levine and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, as well as many other healthcare professionals who were deeply touched by the inspiringly honest quest that they witnessed. A video was made of their stay at the Living/Dying Project.

Since Mark's death in 1984, Lyn has devoted her healing work to an in-depth exploration of the life-altering experiences she started with him. Her quick wit and humor engages others in taking a "peek at making peace with grief." She is presently writing a book entitled Degriefing: the Art of Healing from Loss and Sorrow, and preparing a series of yoga classes for "Grief Relief" intended to be produced bilingually.



LYN PRASHANT

AR Lyn, give us your definition of grief.

LP Grief is a mental and emotional experience, usually triggered by a traumatic loss, with a physiological correlation to deep pain. We are all familiar with "heartache." If a person experiences a traumatic emotional event, such as the loss of a lover or the death of a family member, this mental and emotional state often results in physical sensations. We feel the grief in a specific part of our body—our insides actually hurt. Because our culture does not deal with grieving effectively, I believe such grief can create long-lasting physical imbalances the body.

AR What is "Degriefing?"

LP It is the process of recognizing the mental and physical pain that accompanies grief and treating it with a combination of physical (or somatic) therapies. Certain types of physical therapies (from conventional therapeutic exercise to more unconventional healing techniques)

can unlock and remove the effects of grief from an individual's body, thereby healing not only physical symptoms but mental and emotional wounds as well. Once one realizes the amount of grief he or she is repressing, ignoring, and carrying, then new behavior patterns can be built that will help with the rest of one's life. Grief cannot be avoided.

Degriefing is a unique combination of mind/body therapies which accommodates each person's individual system. Some people resonate with the use of Tibetan bowls for sound/vibrational healing and others might find *t'ai-chi*, *chi-gung*, or yoga the perfect practice to allow their chakras or energy centers to align. It might be acupuncture or aromatherapy, art therapy, or neuro-linguistic programming for others. My personal style of hands-on body-work combines Swedish, lymphatic, deep tissue, Polarity, Reiki, and sound vibrational healing.

AR What about conventional psychotherapies? Don't they work?

LP Yes, they may be effective but, judging from the many people I've worked with, they usually do not even attempt to address the physical imbalances induced by a traumatic loss or great sorrow. The individual's mental state might be temporarily lifted, but the physical state often remains unchanged. Therefore, complete healing can be illusive. However, I have found that by treating the body with specific somatic therapies as well as working with the mind, a person's mental and emotional state usually improves permanently. The term psychosomatic (mind/body) could theoretically be used to describe these techniques, but unfortunately it has developed negative connotations. The term "somatic/psychic" would actually describe the Degriefing techniques I employ, as the emphasis is on the body, and its innate messages received from the "bodymind."

AR Can you give us an example of how Degriefing works?

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LP After doing yoga postures, breathing, and relaxation, people often experience an altered mental and emotional state. Similarly, Degriefing targets parts of the body that store grief in an attempt to release it and promote long-lasting harmony in the mind and body. It creates more space to allow grief to flow through and not get stuck. Grief is a fact of life—it's our relationship to it that we look at in the Degriefing work.

AR So you believe that grief can be stored in our bodies?

LP Yes, definitely. Although sometimes we grieve and it passes through in a relatively short period of time, for instance, when we expect the death of an elderly individual. The sadness is more easily tolerated; we accept the loss relatively easily. That is simple, uncomplicated grief. However, we experience many losses and traumatic events that leave permanent physical scars or imbalances. That's complicated, unresolved grief—which, I believe, resides in the muscles, fascia, and tissues of the body. During massage, clients experience emotional release and get in touch with long dismissed, repressed, or forgotten memories.

There is a direct correlation between my availability to "be there" to work with another's grief release work and how free flowing or blocked I feel in relation to my own grief. For example, we are all familiar with the cultural message not to cry or display our emotions. We all know that this stoic behavior is unnatural and that we feel better when we cry. The release is physical. There are real biochemical changes that go on when we cry. However, if we do not experience a release, the body will remember the event. Storing grief is very taxing and unhealthy. Recently, even modern Western science has discovered that seemingly non-physical constructs, such as memory, intuition, and emotion, have physical correlates.

AR What are some physical (or somatic) therapies that you use and recommend?

LP It depends somewhat on the person's beliefs and the setting in which they are being treated. All are centered around compassionate touch, communication, and body awareness. For a person with strict Western beliefs being treated in a hospital, I may recommend conventional physical therapies combined with massage and compassionate touch therapy. These patients are not likely to be aware of the body's energy fields and would scoff at nontraditional healing techniques. However, aerobic exercise alone will not change the body's pattern of storing emotional states. A more focused approach is required. Many individuals respond well to professional bodywork which helps realign the musculo/skeletal system. This opens energy channels and *chakras*. A variety of therapeutic massage techniques, such as Swedish, Shiatsu, lymphatic, Polarity and Reiki, can effectively be combined to create a truly exponential effect.

"Pampering" massage alone is powerful for stress reduction and is tremendously beneficial for the maintenance of well-being. Since the goal of Degriefing is to unlock blockages, the therapeutic intention held by the therapist and the client together can be the hidden key. This usually requires focused work by a trained physical practitioner as well as a skillful "talk" therapist or a support group.

For those open to more esoteric therapies I may recommend a combination of acupuncture, dance therapy, deep massage, compassionate touch therapy, and vibration therapy. I often use tuning forks and Tibetan bowls. I've used auditory treatments and even long distance healing. These are all effective in helping to restore the body's natural balance. In fact, cross-cultural and anthropological data from non-Western and non-modern societies show that these treatments have

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been effectively used by healers throughout the ages.

AR What do you plan to do with the knowledge that you've gained?

LP I currently offer classes around the Bay Area and training seminars for groups ranging from medical professionals to massage therapists. I offer sessions for individuals, couples, families, and organizations (such as in-service workshops). I am currently working on a manuscript for a book.

I was giving my husband, Mark, a massage while we were living at the Living/Dying project and I asked him, "What am I to do with the rest of my life after you die?" He thought for a while and very deliberately said, "Learn to love everything as you love me." I do love my work, so I guess I am following his simple, wise, but not-so-easy suggestion!

Stephen and Ondrea Levine, respected authors and teachers of 'Conscious Living/Conscious Dying', endorse Lyn's work by saying, "Lyn is a highly skilled worker who knows first hand the depth of healing that grief calls for—she is committed to serving those in difficulty."

For information about Degriefing presentations, facility in-services, C.E.U. professional trainings, private sessions, and purchase of the Degriefing Manual:

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