



"MY BODY SAID YES. I FELT EXERCISED, OPEN AND ALIVE."

## A LOVING CONNECTION TO THE UNKNOWN

Written by yoga instructor, art educator Meri Mort, translation by Helena Björk. Pictures by Meri Mort. Published in Finnish in Ananda Magazine 2/2012

I came to know **Helen Noakes** in 2005 in Goa, India. I had injured my back previously in a yoga practice that was too tough for me and could not, while in Finland, even rise up to downward facing dog. My friend attended an Ashtanga mysore class in the morning, and very intuitively I decided to try something else. In this class there were many beginners and the teacher was a lively, happy woman. I immediately noticed that she was strong, yet soft, with a tolerant gaze and a fluid body language. I was

shocked when we were asked to try downward facing dog in pairs, and I found myself partnered with a man attending class for the first time. I was afraid of letting a beginner assist me, but my inner voice said YES. Through the partner practice I found mobility and length in my back, and although the experience differed greatly from all the yoga classes I had attended, it stayed in my mind as a luminous, remarkable experience. I never returned to an Ashtanga class.

Now, years later, I instruct in the same style myself. Helen has also visited Finland twice to share her inspiring and creative spiral movements.

## WAIT TIL YOUR BODY SAYS YES

When Helen was introduced to **Scaravelli inspired** practice (See Ananda 2/2011, interview with Sandra Sabatini), she felt she understood nothing of this new approach. Yet, somehow it all felt good. She began

to understand the lengthening of the spine from within. "My body said YES. I felt exercised, open and alive. It all felt so effortless. When my body became receptive, it started speaking to me and I had to listen. I was able to dive in deeper." Helen calls this practice a universal and organic juicy approach! It provides tools for relaxation and finding joy in the practice.

"One of Vanda Scaravelli's most powerful insights is that of Undoing'. I still find the practice very powerful. It is much more challenging to listen and wait for the body rather than force it into shapes. There is nothing to do but stop, listen and respond! It is the most radical style and expression of yoga I have discovered. It demands you to experiment and explore."

Helen's classes are free of hierarchy, and beginners are not separated from the so-called advanced students. "Anyone is invited to attend to my classes. The real challenge is to teach so that everyone at any level can benefit. It is necessary to improvise and encounter people in the

present moment, keeping the teaching creative and spontaneous. People are much more open to suggestions in intuitive movement when the atmosphere is safe and playful!"





“IT IS MUCH MORE CHALLENGING TO LISTEN  
AND WAIT FOR THE BODY RATHER THAN  
FORCE IT INTO SHAPES.”

## LISTEN WITH YOUR FEET AND FOLLOW YOUR INTUITION

During a massage training course in 1995, Helen's teacher suggested she approach a woman who gave ayurvedic treatments with her feet. Through London the journey went on to India to study **Chavutti Thirumal** with another teacher **Veejay Nair**. The technique has been developed through the Kalari system, an ancient martial art, to recover the body and heal pain after combat. This kind of body work relaxes clients deeply and the results are usually that people feel very grounded yet invigorated!

The Chavutti massage uses a rope suspended from opposing walls, from which Helen can support herself when working with her feet. Many of the massaging strokes are similar to yoga poses, like the warrior. The body worker must learn to have a good sense of balance enabling

both the therapist and the client to benefit from feeling grounded and centred. Helen attends several alternative yoga and dance classes and enjoys her body's ability to speak different languages. "It is perfectly ok to say no to an adjustment in class and listen to the body when something feels stressful. I have never injured myself when practicing this style of yoga."

In her thirties, Helen travelled India, visiting many ashrams, shaved her hair, dressed in orange and dived into the world of Gurus! Until one day she asked herself WHY? When she met the first teacher inspired by Scaravelli, her whole body responded to the practice: "All the answers are inside me. All I need to do is listen."

"Similar to yoga, Chavutti is about focusing on another human being, hearing the song of the body: whether to touch lovingly, adjust gently or with strength. Massaging especially with the feet is not only connected with the fluidity of the body, but also the spine and the inner core of our body. During a massage session a wordless conversation takes place."

The more she teaches massage, the more convinced Helen is that the feet are just as intuitive as the hands. "When I tune into to the dance of the massage, my mind calms down and my feet tell me to how the pressure should be, gentle strokes or long and flowing ironing movements." All types of bodywork, giving or receiving, can help develop a deeper awareness of one's own postural awareness.

## A STRONG CONNECTION EVERYWHERE

Helen was born in Great Britain. She still loves the British summer but has been on the road for over twenty years. At the start of her journey Helen had to recognize that she was born to be a nomad and finally give in to the idea. After a year of living in Australia she felt a strong urge to leave her old life behind. Having travelled to New Zealand and Canada, she found herself on Lake Atitlan in Guatemala. "On my 29th birthday a shaman expressed to me

that I needed to study - that I was to go to India and learn bodywork. I was afraid to go to India but I felt a strong urge to be there! I sat alone on the plane to Mumbai, not knowing what kind of place I was entering. India was at first an immense challenge, now my second home. Freedom and spirituality are strongly present there. India has its own unique energy and diversity, soundscape and scents. Everything is outrageous, and the secret is to find your peace amongst the chaos."

A nomadic lifestyle has been like a leap into the unknown, but a solid foundation stays with Helen. "I feel privileged to enjoy the freedom of being able to travel, discover and teach my passion" Helen wishes to inspire others to live their dream! •

**HELEN NOAKES TEACHES WORKSHOPS IN HELSINKI AND LEVI, LAPLAND IN SEPTEMBER 2012.**

**MORE INFORMATION:**

**[WWW.MERIMORT.COM](http://WWW.MERIMORT.COM)**

**[WWW.HELENNOAKES.NET](http://WWW.HELENNOAKES.NET)**