

Addiction, Recovery & Yoga - About the Film

Addiction Recovery and Yoga is a documentary that I did not expect to make. It contains innovative and valuable information, which I hope will help you or someone you know. I distribute it for free because it is simpler that way. And it is not a propaganda film or an infomercial for anyone, any product or service; so please relax on that account. There is a lot in the film. Please take what you can.

Addiction, Recovery and Yoga came about through my work as a yoga teacher and yoga therapist. For about twenty years, I have been teaching mostly privately and specialize in treating people who have stress-related conditions. Over the years, a few students have had addiction problems - cocaine, alcohol and prescription drugs mostly. They were dealing with staying free of their addiction in a number of ways, one of which was AA - Alcoholics Anonymous.

I did not know anything about AA, and I wanted to know more about it. I only had a vague idea that there was might be something uncool about it - a sort of prejudice that I had picked up along the way somehow. I know a little about drugs and addiction, not so much from personal experience, but as a filmmaker in the 70s and 80s, I had directed many music videos and was used to musicians and artists using drugs as part of their work. And, in some cases, the way they suffered as a result.

I had started my yoga practice in 1970 and, along with my wife Bobby, had spent a lot of time in Pune, India attending month-long intensive workshops taught by B.K.S. Iyengar, the famous yoga teacher. So in London at that time, I was the odd man out when my filmmaking clients, music celebs and record company executives, were snorting cocaine at the nightclub. Drugs were cool. But yoga was not cool in 1970's; it was only just beginning to catch on in the West.

So, twenty years later, as a yoga therapist, retired from filmmaking, I was not shocked to learn that some of my (very successful) students had addiction problems and were attending AA twelve-step meetings, which deal not only with

alcoholism, but with drug and other addictions as well. So in order to educate myself, I went along to the nearest AA meeting. It happened to be held at the Community Center, which our garden backs onto here in Greenwich Village, New York.

To my surprise, my experience of the AA meeting was more than positive. I was inspired by it. I had never experienced a social situation where people were being so open and honest about the most intimate, difficult, and sometimes disastrous aspects of their lives. But more than that, there was an atmosphere of genuine support that was based on a group practice of non-judgmental fellowship. It was an effective practice that made it possible for people to confront their own difficulties more clearly – basically being on their own case, not everyone else's, and learning from each other, taking support from the group. I learned that this was just a small part of some very practical and profound principles that made up the AA 12-step program.

My vaguely prejudiced attitude had changed. So in the class that I teach at the New York Iyengar Yoga Institute, I said to my students "Oh, I went to an AA meeting the other day, it was really great, I was so surprised". Anyway, about three months later one of my students in that class came up to me and said, "Thank you so much for saying that about AA, I am now 63 days sober." Well, if you have ever been to an AA meeting you will know that when someone is counting the days that they have been sober (one day at a time) it is very important to them. I was happy that something good had come out of my comment.

It struck me that, unlike some addiction rehab facilities that can cost a thousand dollars a day, AA 12-step and yoga were really cost-effective options. Ordinary people could afford them.

I think that it was after the third cup of tea one morning that it further struck me that if I made a film about addiction recovery and yoga, I could distribute it for free on the Internet and help many more people, maybe thousands, the way a few words had helped the student in my yoga class at the Iyengar Institute.

After all, I was some sort of award winning filmmaker at one time, so why not do it. And anyway, where did I stand now, forty years later? What was my attitude now to the 60's & 70's era of sex, drugs and rock and roll and the voices of the social revolution that was hoped for at the time? I'll keep it simple, no room to examine these issues now, except to say that the drugs were the big problem.

By a fairly large and influential generation of artists writers and musicians, the idea was indirectly proposed that the way to be cool or explore and manage consciousness was with drugs, including alcohol. Some creative people gained useful insights and perspectives because of drugs, but at what price? I wondered about it then, but now I clearly think that substance abuse, either recreationally for stress relief, or psychotherapeutically with overly prescribed pharmaceuticals for depression, anxiety etc., is a cause of unhappiness and worse for many people.

I was part of that 60's generation. I can remember joking at the time that I thought that commuters would get a better grasp of reality by smoking a joint in the morning rather than reading Rupert Murdoch's newspapers. But times change. I have seen the very bad effects that drugs can have and I have seen the substantially positive effects of yoga on many people over my forty years experience with yoga So I do not have any doubt on the subject. And I felt a need to make some sort of statement with the film as well as taking an opportunity to be of some help to people generally.

I was very lucky that my old friend from years ago in Pune, India, Father Joe Pereira, was coming to New York to teach a yoga workshop at the Iyengar Institute. He was actually staying with me and my wife Bobby, and he liked a cup of tea in the morning, so we had a chance to talk about the documentary project that I had in mind.

Father Joe is probably the world's leading expert on yoga and 12-step recovery. He is a longtime senior student of B.K.S. Iyengar, heads up 30 rehab centers in India and had just been honored and awarded the Padma Sri medal by the Indian Government for his work in addiction recovery. A great yoga practitioner, Father Joe was my first interview, so very open-minded and knowledgeable, he got me off to a

good start.

You might think that it would be difficult to get people to talk about this, usually hidden, part of their lives, especially in a film. But it is one of the AA principals to reach out and help others. This is most clearly expressed by Louise in the very first line of the film when she says:

“I don’t have a problem with answering questions about alcoholism because I think it is such a huge problem for so many people. And its part of my duty – not duty- duty is too strong a word. It’s part of my recovery process to allow people into that part of my life, and to own it. There might be someone out there, who is struggling, who might need some help – who might think, oh my God, that girl’s an alcoholic, perhaps she can help me. So that’s why I am prepared to talk about it”

Louise’s statement was an inspiration for me.

When they watch the film, students of yoga, and people with addiction problems, will appreciate Louise in many ways. Notice, that in her very first statement, she makes a switch from using the word, “duty”, with its implication of an externally approved edifice of individual achievement and virtue, to “my recovery process” with it’s liberating humility and profound focus on the subjective condition and freedom from affliction – an important principle in yoga.

Liberation from the dominance of that aspect of our mental process, which we refer to as ego, and the sometimes lethal delusions and capacity for denial that can be part of it, is an interesting theme that runs throughout the film – explained very adequately by all the interviewees who include two yoga teachers. Also explored is the concept of surrender to higher power, which in AA is considered essential to recovery. It is interesting how people effectively interpret this idea in different ways and for others it is a stumbling block. Nonetheless, freedom from ego-driven and compulsive behavior will help anyone be a little happier. The film does not have a position on Higher Power. It is not an infomercial for any particular group. It hopes only to inform the viewer as a way of helping with the difficulties that people sometimes face in life. And it is there for free.

It is early days. We have had a very good response showing the film and following it with a workshop. Robert Cory and I have done one and so has Tori Milner, who is the expert, and more are planned in USA and Canada. We welcome other teachers to do the same. It is possible to make a DVD by downloading from one of the sites listed below.

Working with Director of Photography, Jake Clennell and editor, Hisayo Kushida it took 18 months to make the film. Currently the film is being translated into Japanese and Spanish. I want to get a Russian translation started soon. (any offers??)

I hope you get a chance to view the film. It's easily available on YouTube, Google video, Veoh, Vimeo, Yahoo Video or www.adyo.org.

I hope you enjoy the film.
My best wishes to you.
Lindsey Clennell