

A Conversation on Compassion With Tiffany Cruikshank

Transcript of Tiffany Cruikshank on Bridging Yoga and Healthcare, and the Power of Practice

Hello! Welcome to Conversations On Compassion brought to you by University of Arizona College of SBS Center for Compassion Studies! This is Leslie Langbert.

I am talking today with one of the UA's former students who actually has created a really fantastic healing career. I'm talking today with Tiffany Cruikshank. She is an internationally celebrated yoga teacher and acupuncturist. You may have seen her on the cover of Yoga Journal once or twice or a few times or read some articles she's authored about the anatomy of yoga.

Its always super exciting for us to talk with people who are out in the world shaping healthcare, shaping compassion and it was really exciting for us to talk with a former Wildcat, and 'virtually' welcome her back to the UA and talk with her about what she's up to. So, join me for this conversation, and enjoy!

Leslie: Welcome Tiffany! Thank you so much for coming to have this conversation with us. We're so excited to talk with you about your practice, and your work. Welcome back in a virtual way to the UA! We know that you were a student here, and I'd love to just dive in by asking you about the beginnings of your own yoga practice. I know you've been practicing for most of your life, and had this practice while you were a college student. Maybe share a little about how you got started and what you remember about how your yoga and meditation practices supported you when you were in college?

Tiffany: Yeah! I started when I was 14. I think for me, being really athletic growing up, the physicality of it was really intriguing, but there's obviously something different than playing sports, or athletics – it wasn't competitive,



you know. I played really competitive tennis, and I think being able to go and be really active and physical without putting that pressure on myself, I put a lot of pressure on myself with competitive athletics. It was really welcoming to be in my body and you know at the time I was going to classes that were ashtanga classes that weren't led so you'd hear people breathing and moving and they're kind of moving at their own pace it was a really interesting, really cool aspect to being able to show up and feel like we were all together even though we were all doing very different things. So I think that physicality was a really interesting part of it for me, and I don't really know that I knew...that I ever really sat down to think about what intrigued me about it, honestly there were deeper layers that kept me coming back for more, because clearly there's plenty of ways to be physical (laughs).

But I graduated early and I went up to college at [age] 16, and there weren't many yoga teachers so I decided that it was my duty to become a yoga teacher, and I enjoyed sharing [the practice] with family and friends so I thought it would be a fun thing to do. I not only practiced but taught all through college, and it was really interesting for me as a college student. Not only was I able to show up and guide people through this practice who were much older than me – which was a trippy scenario for me as a teenager to step into, but also to have those tools as a college student with stress, and deadlines and all these new obstacles. Going from living with your parents to being on your own and figuring things out – I think yoga was a very influential factor. I did my undergrad and then went on to Chinese Medicine...for Chinese Medicine school, and I remember one of my colleagues in Chinese Medicine school saying to me that I did really well on all the tests because 'of course, because you do yoga every day' (laughs). I thought to myself, what a funny thing to say! I mean, this was in 2001 or something, and I remember thinking...I mean, yoga was still fairly new then, but people knew enough about it and I was like, 'if you know that, then why aren't you doing it?' (laughs)

Leslie: Exactly!

Tiffany: But it definitely helped me through. Having a regular practice was such a great resource for me, not only to keep me mentally strong but to help with stress, and a nice way of taking care of myself, and then being able to extend that to other people which is very interesting for me, I think because ever since I started both teaching yoga as well as practicing working with holistic therapy, I think I was always intrigued with this ability to help other people in a way. Clearly that evolved many times over (laughs).



Leslie: It's been so amazing to see your career path unfold. Just incredible that from starting yoga at such a young age, and seeing that you've carved out this path into Chinese Medicine and bringing the best of Western and Eastern medicine together...was your practice in college part of what ignited the realization for you that this is what you wanted to do for your work?

Tiffany: I think the practice...in some ways was a way of me developing a routine and a sense of determination – maybe not determination, dedication, I guess? As a mental resource, but it also was a testament to – we all have ups and downs in our lives- but a testament to being able to use some of these practices to help with physical ailments or mental focus or being able to calm myself. There are many challenges you face in an academic setting and pressures – I think the yoga practice definitely helped me with that and definitely was a support to that.

Leslie: After graduating and getting your Master's in Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, you had a wonderful career unfolding at Nike, correct?

Tiffany: Yeah, so I actually had a practice in Portland, and then actually saw patients in New York as well. I came back to Portland for the gig at Nike [yoga instructor and acupuncturist for Nike's headquarters in Portland, OR]. It was great – I had some experience running my own clinic in Portland and then I got the chance to work with this really incredible doctor in New York – Dr. Frank Lipman, who's written a bunch of books and he's also an acupuncturist. I got to learn so much from him and some other doctors there. It was such a great experience for me to be there and learn from such incredible people, and then to have the opportunity to take all of that to Nike- that was definitely...I was just talking with my partner about this last night...it was definitely a career-changing moment for me to be able to go back and also take what I loved, which was being athletic, and fusing it with my specialty. So when I went through Chinese Medicine school, afterwards I did a specialty in sports medicine and orthopedics, so that's always been really fascinating to me, how the body moves and how it works, so obviously there's a huge mental component behind that as well. The beauty of the yoga practice is that it's three dimensional, it's not just the physical body that you work with. But yeah, being able to bring that back and work with athletes and work at the Nike Headquarters there with a resource – I started the acupuncture program there and ran that for 6 or 7 years and then taught yoga for athletes there...I evolved a lot as a teacher and a practitioner there, and really enjoyed being there and that sense of community there. I sometimes miss the community there, but I had other progressions along the way.



Leslie: You're talking about all of this deep training you received and how this helps you evolve and hone the way you teach. One of the things I appreciate about your teaching is your depth of knowledge and precision about the human body. Having practiced with you in that way, it's been really powerful for me.

Tiffany: I think the physicality of yoga is such a huge entry point to everything else. Everyone can relate to their physical body. It's a little harder, especially at first to relate to emotional, mental, or spiritual concepts. I kind of think about it as a huge gymnasium, you enter into this realm of yoga, and some of us come in for the physical, some of us come in for the spiritual, some of us come in for the mental side, now more so than ever I think people are coming in for the mental effect. You know we're all talking about similar things, it's all addressing similar things you know? I think there's some negativity in the yoga world around the practices being just physical, and in my experience it's never really just physical. Even if you go to a purely physical practice, if you stay around long enough, you feel something. That was my experience you know when I first started I knew there was something more, even though I couldn't put my finger on it. I personally grew up in a very conservative family, that was very Christian, and for me, yoga was always...I was definitely not as skeptical as my parents – my parents always thought I had joined a cult (laughs). I mean, this was in the early to mid 90's so they were always really afraid. I think growing up in that tradition, I'm always skeptical myself of not necessarily in my own personal practice as much as really wanting to keep everything open, to every vantage point so that everyone can enjoy the practice. There are no restraints on beliefs or spiritual practices. You can come into this practice and connect to something that's really alive for you in that moment and in that day, and the physical practices really allow us to alternate that. I don't mean to say that there's not a place for the spiritual practices – there's obviously a really important benefit to that as well, but I think they're all really talking about the same thing, they're all really working toward a very similar thing, although our goals may be different.

I remember when I did my first yoga teacher training when I was 16, back then, there were maybe two trainings in the country, and there wasn't internet yet, and so you learned about them through brochures, and one of them was during the summer, so that was the one I could do, so I went, and I didn't really know much about it. It was very much a spiritually oriented practice, which you know, was really great for me to learn the philosophy behind some of the traditional practices, it was a great place to start, but there was this pressure to be like, this spiritual guru, and there's a whole



purpose for the practice is to become enlightened, and I still can't completely wrap my head around this idea of being enlightened – obviously there is someone who can speak to that more than I can (laughs), someone who could teach that more, and clearly there is something there, that people want to experience on some level. But you know, it always felt so far away, so difficult to grasp. I think back in the '70's... '70's, '80's, '90's that was a big part of the yoga practice, and now, it's evolving and there's some controversy over whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, but I think that everything that brings us back to ourselves, that reminds us who we are, whether that's our hamstrings or our liver, or our mind...our spiritual practice I think is an important practice for all of us.

Leslie: Absolutely. And you've taken this and created YogaMedicine, which from what I've seen on your website, looks amazing. I want you to share – this is your baby, right that you started a couple of years ago? I also want to know, what was the impetus to take that leap to create this big, thriving business?

Tiffany: Yeah! I get that question a lot. I don't know that it was ever my intention to set out to create this business; I think like everyone, our paths evolve. I had this teacher who said to me, 'I wish I'd found yoga when you did', but we also gather so many life experiences from whatever we do, whether we find that at 14 or 25 or 50. We have so many life experiences to take with us that are really valuable and important. It definitely wasn't my purpose, I didn't have YogaMedicine in mind when I started teaching yoga, in fact I remember when I was going through Chinese Medicine school, I was at one point taking 13 classes in one quarter and on top of that I was teaching maybe 10 classes a week – ha! It was a lot, and I was studying a ton, and I'm not really sure how I did it, looking back on it, but I remember my mom saying to me, "Why are you still teaching – why are you teaching so much? You need to focus on your studies and I don't understand why you're teaching so much when you're just going to quit teaching when you get a real job". (laughs). It's really funny to look back on now, that I went through a really good 7 years of my life really treating 50 -60 patients a week, and now, a good chunk of years now where I still see patients, but very few, and focus mostly on teaching yoga, which is kinda crazy to think on after her comments, and that was really her perspective, and I think back on when I first started to teach yoga, the idea was when you commit to teaching yoga, you've basically given up your attachment to money, to fame, to any of those things, to be this humble yoga teacher who serves their community. Which has evolved, no judgment, obviously I think its really great to see yoga isn't going anywhere, and the fads of yoga are what

they are, and they kind of ebb and flow, but I never would have guessed that yoga would be where it is now! (laughs). So many years ago if you had told me...and I think even more so, meditation. If you had told me meditation would be a trend, in the '90s I would have laughed at you. (laughs)

And it's so cool to see so much research, and so much momentum behind it, people using it. I work with professional athletes and celebrities and all sorts of people, and even the general consensus in corporations or with athletes or whoever...there's a general consensus or general awareness that meditation is very beneficial, for whatever reason. Obviously there's a lot of preconceived notions or ideas around that.

But yeah, it definitely evolved. When I was first seeing patients, after I graduated, I was teaching a lot of yoga and a lot of my patients were yoga students. Not necessarily just ones I taught, but other people's students they would send to me. One of the beautiful things about the practice, that you may have experienced as well, is that it uncovers things. Like you could sit at your desk and have injuries for many years and never be physical...and yoga really tests your body in many different ways, so it's hard to have nagging injuries persist and not do something about them. You know there's a lifestyle component to it which is really beautiful – we become more proactive in our healthcare and our wellness, which to me, is really wonderful as a healthcare provider because we have patients that are really compliant and proactive and really excited to be involved in their health and wellness. And just like a professional athlete as well, to really feel the effects and notice the difference in how they feel, whether that's in yoga, in work, or with their family, or just in their body.

And so, I started seeing patients and right away I started noticing that my patients who were yoga students, not only were they getting better faster...not only were they more compliant, they also got better faster, they seemed to respond, their healing capacities seemed to be much higher and the resilience seemed stronger. This is obviously a generality, but I saw differences in my patients who were not yoga students. So I started prescribing yoga poses for my patients who were not yoga students, you know, like one or two poses, or maybe it was breathing, or meditation, really simple stuff, tailoring it so that it was relevant to whatever they were being treated for, and as more of a way to have continuing care.

For me, it was never about making my patients dependent on me, but it was really about getting them to take care of themselves and take their health



and wellness in their hands. Which is really why I wrote my book too, to be a resource of information for people to be proactive in their health. But as I was working with patients, and using yoga more, and connecting with other healthcare providers – as a healthcare provider as an acupuncturist, it's so nice to have resources in other providers that you work with, and as I connected more with them, I noticed that there was a desire for them to be able to send their patients to do yoga. There was an interest, and intrigue, and clearly that's coming along faster and slower in different parts of the country and the world, and every person is different, but especially now as we see this younger generation of doctors coming out of medical school who have done yoga, and even the older generation of doctors who are starting to do yoga, or have done it for a while, as they experience it, they want to translate that to their patients.

I think our healthcare systems are so overburdened right now, we could talk about pain for a long time – and it would be an interesting topic, but, not just with pain itself, but so many other issues, heart disease, diabetes...so many things that can be helped, not just with exercise – like I said, the exercise component is a big thing, but the mindfulness and the lifestyle components that are acquired through that mindfulness...having patients who actually *want* to feel better, who start to notice, first, just how bad they feel! Our bodies get really good at tuning that out, and for me, yoga is the foundation for all of your medical care to some extent. Because if I have a patient who comes in – or I'm a doctor who has a patient who can't give you any feedback about how they're feeling and you're giving them medication, it can become a little trickier to help moderate their care and and difficult...it shifts a lot of weight onto your shoulders and you become the primary caregiver, which is kind of how our medical system is set up. You go in, you get your pill and you leave, and all the weight is on the doctor's shoulders to heal you. That's a lot to carry around! It's exhausting. Our medical providers are overworked – they're well paid, but for the amount of time they have to put in, and for the amount of debt that they have, and comparatively to other professions where people make millions of dollars...they are underpaid, depending upon who we're talking about. With all the time they put in, and how overworked they are, and all the debt...I mean, don't even get into all the school loans and debt....so, I think there's a desire for healthcare providers to want to be able to help people.

This overprescribing of medications I think comes from a good place – I think there's a valuable place for medications to be prescribed, and doctors ultimately want to help people, they go into the profession to help people. So, you know, for me, it was kind of watching and seeing, like, OK, we have



this negative view of prescriptions and some of the difficulties of our healthcare system, and ultimately it comes from a good place and how do I bridge that gap? For me yoga was such an important step in supporting mindfulness, and the lifestyle effects of the physical practice and the mental practice – knowing that doctors wanted it, it was just having a resource. Anyone who is familiar with yoga, even a little bit knows there is such a huge variety within the yoga practice. If you're a medical doctor, and you're referring someone to go to yoga, they could be jumping around in handstand, sitting on the floor and chanting, or doing Yin yoga and deeply stretching, or gently stretching, I mean every teacher within one style has a different take, and it's really difficult to say 'you've got this shoulder injury' or 'you've got diabetes' or 'you've got this...' and to say 'do yoga' could be somewhat negligent (laughs).

So what we wanted to do, our whole purpose, to go to the original question, was to create a bridge for doctors to be able to refer their patients that was based on transparency. Our whole model was based on, you can go on our site, you can see each teacher, you can see exactly what training they've completed with us – the shoulder, have they studied more on the nervous system, have they studied more on meditation, you know, we've got tons of different trainings they could take, and really being able to train teachers in the Western and Eastern concepts. Obviously there's so much to the traditional practice of yoga, but how we tie that in with the Western medical orientation is really important I think to what makes sense of what they've been told as well as to integrate it into the treatment that they're getting. It never serves anyone to have confusion within some of those modalities, or things that feel separate or different or in opposition to each other.

Our purpose is to serve the medical providers, to serve the medical world, to take some burden off their shoulders and to be able to help the patients. Not to diagnose – we're really clear our job as yoga teachers is not to take their healthcare in our own hands, it's not to diagnose, but really to be a guide to introspective awareness in the body, and do the best we can to help them unlock their innate healing capacity – if that makes sense.

Leslie: It's incredible. You're really pioneering, taking what's been considered really complementary medicine and taking it to the next level. What are you and the yoga teachers you're taking through YogaMedicine...are there common medical conditions that they're coming back and saying 'wow, we're really seeing positive success in partnering with allopathic physicians around [these] particular issues'?



Tiffany: Well, I think pain is always the biggest one. That's kind of the biggest thing you see in medical care, now there's so much spotlight on it too. What I love about using yoga for pain, in particular, is not just the physical practice, because clearly there's a huge place for physical therapy that yoga can't replace - it's essential, and crucial. But, I think there's a lot more to it, especially on a long term basis. A lot of people 'graduate' from their PT, and still might have some experience of pain or functional limitations and have run out of PT sessions, and that might be because of insurance, or who knows what. But it's also then rebuilding those pathways to change how they adapt in the world post-deficit, post-pain, and kind of improve the way they relate. There's so much on the yoga side. The more I study the more I realize how brilliant the applicability the yoga practices are, but the mental practices...I think the more I study anatomy, and science, and the nervous system, the more I realize how much of it comes back to our experiences in the world around us.

I went to a seminar this past weekend on neuroimmunology and neurodynamics and this awareness of both peripheral nerve dysfunction, or mechanical pain, or injuries in the tissues, a lot of it goes back to the central processing. The reality is that pain happens in our brain. We all know this. We study basic anatomy courses and learn that pain actually happens in the brain, it doesn't happen in the tissues. We don't have pain receptors, per se, we have known perceptors that perceive extreme changes that could be a threat to the system. And so our ability to work with pain in a yoga context is brilliant because it's all about introspection, it's based on body awareness, it's based on watching how the body moves, and relates to the world around us. Which isn't necessarily rocket science. It doesn't necessarily have to be anything overly planned or overly thought out, as much as changing how the human experience interrelates with the world around us. Simple things like breathing and mindfulness are kind of the foundation of that. Being able to just pay attention to it and notice 'oh wow! That is really interesting, when I do that, this happens, but it's not necessarily that pain. I can do it, and change these responses in my brain, and actually have a completely different outcome.' Or I can do these exercises that are maybe a little bit more safe or less threatening to me, and maybe visualize doing them in a different scenario, and slowly start to re-educate those neural connections so that at some point I can start to move in those less threatening, more safe scenarios in a comfortable way.

There's definitely a lot of new information coming in to pain science, and there's a lot of information and intricacies that we could explore, but the beauty of the yoga practices is we don't necessarily need to go through all of



that. It's really interesting now too, when we find new scientific research that comes out that validates things that maybe we've been doing. I posted, and I don't know that this completely validates, but there's some research I posted recently about the existence of lymphatic vessels in the brain, which in medical school, and maybe that's changing now, but you're taught that there is no lymphatic system in the brain. And so looking at how this relates to things we've done in the yoga practice, in Ayurveda they've been talking about doing lymphatic drainage for the brain, which obviously, would not be agreed upon in a western context until now. But we see things like inversions which change pressure in the lymphatic system which is a big part of that drainage in the lymphatic system and can be really helpful for a lot of different brain issues, and obviously that's a lot longer story around specific brain problems, and I think a lot more research needs to happen to actually validate these things. It's interesting to see when new research comes out 'oh wow, maybe that's why we actually feel these effects from the yoga practice.' Maybe *this* is what's happening. You know it's cool to have that scientific backup because the reality is these practices have been done for thousands of years and we learn so much just from our experience, that sometimes as a patient we can invalidate our experience. I have patients that come in all the time that are so caught up in their diagnosis, and part of the treatment is just unraveling that identification with the problem, with the disease, with the dysfunction, and really getting them to step into their experience of what that actually means to them, what that translates to feel like, and how does working with this thing change their experience in their body. And even more importantly, how do they connect with their family, how do they appreciate their lives, and the ability to really appreciate the richness and the fullness of their lives. It's a harder thing to quantify but I think one of the most important things.

Leslie: You know, holding this space that you do, as a deep healer, and having that beautiful balance of keeping yourself aware of emerging research, and engaging in it yourself but also holding such a deeply compassionate stance for your students, and your patients, as you're clearly describing it...one of the things that we talk about, and we serve a lot of people that are in healthcare, or in helping professions, is this tendency that people have to give and give and they find that it's not sustainable over time. How are you in your practices cultivating maintaining self-compassion and maintaining that balance and that strength? What sustains you in being able to continue to grow and share everything that you're doing?

Tiffany: That's a good question. Like everyone, there's a million things going on at any point in our lives, and I think self-care is such a big part of



it. Obviously my yoga practice and I think even more so my meditation practice is a really big part of my self-care. I was actually diagnosed when I was really young as a teenager as ADD (attention deficit disorder), which I don't really do anything for now, but they tried to put me on medications and, for me, who knows where I would be if I didn't have my meditation and my yoga practice. It's definitely helped me really be able to focus and be present in what I do. I think as a self-care modality, it's everything for me. You know, I think it's really important to be passionate about what you do. I struggled for a long time to find balance, and I actually enjoy being busy. I plan downtimes for myself and I love going on vacation, but I find myself planning to do things because I actually enjoy what I love and so I've kind of learned to make peace with that over the years. Obviously there's a balance. There is a point where I can do too much and burn myself out, but there is a really big difference in that mind capacity when I really enjoy something, its effect on me, and working a lot when you really enjoy something versus you hate it.

I mean, we all have to do monotonous tasks that we don't enjoy, or as much, and get through that. It's not just this thought that we're going to find the perfect job where we will love everything. I think that's an interesting delusion out there in the world right now, that you're going to find the perfect job and it's going to be amazing and you're going to make lots of money and you're just going to love life, and everyone's going to love you and it's just going to be perfect. You know, I think everything requires work. I've worked really hard to create this business, and I love it. If you find something that you're really passionate about and it meets the needs of your community, it can come together in a way that really feeds everyone. The trick is finding both – finding a niche of something that's really needed in the world. If I can take my strengths and the needs of people around me and bring them together, it allows us all to become somewhat fulfilled in the process. I think the best part of the self-care, obviously, to some people that means – I have a lot of people who have a 9-5 job and teach for that sense of fulfillment, to really kind of bring them back to their lives to feel like they're really helping people.

There are so many jobs in this world that someone's got to fill, and we all have to do our part to work together to make this world beautiful, to make it what it is, and that involves all of us doing something we don't enjoy, but if you can find that passion and strength and use it in a way that really meets the needs of the world right now – I think that's a big part of it, and finding ways to take care of yourself. The mindfulness, for me, the meditation and the yoga provides a platform for me to realize, 'oh, ok I'm going a little to

far now, I need to be sure to take a step back' and the self-care – whether that's nutritionally, or taking some time for myself, or going on vacation (laughs) whatever that might be, you know there's a lot of ways our bodies just need to not work for a little bit. Sometimes we need better food, sometimes we need better sleep. But yeah, I think having an ongoing practice of either yoga or meditation – even if it's just ten minutes a day for people it's such a big thing.

I think people put too much pressure on themselves to try to establish a practice that's an hour and a half, or they have to go to these yoga practices, which is why I really love YogaGlo. We were talking about that earlier, the unfortunate thing about going to a yoga class, which I think is invaluable, and irreplaceable, to get that sense of being in a community, is that most classes are an hour, or an hour and a half, and then you drive there, and you drive back, and you've got a couple hours – that's a big chunk of time out of your day. I can be compassionate to that, I can empathize with that (laughs). And so, not feeling like you have to have these long practices, just 10 minutes a day, sitting and meditating, setting something you can commit to, so you can reset that baseline.

One of the things I love about meditation is that it is this process of introspection, and hopefully at some point during your day you notice your breath, you notice how you're feeling. Think about the last couple days of your life. In the last couple of days have you stopped once to just consider 'what am I feeling in my body right now?' 'what does it feel like to breathe in this moment?' 'what are the sensations, what is going on?' The beauty of meditation is there's no judgment. I'm not trying to stop it, I'm not trying to breathe perfectly or deeply, I'm just trying to connect. To try to put my finger on the pulse of what it means to be me in this moment. What it means to be alive, and how do I enhance that? How do I turn that volume level up or down? My ability to magnify that sense of life and ability to thrive in the moment...sometimes that's with nutrition, or maybe with yoga practices, but it's through my mindset, my perspective, my ability to connect to this awareness in the body.

I think those little things are such an important part of self-care. And those are the things that are so easy to overlook, and I do it too! We're all guilty, it's human nature. We get so caught up in what we're doing, and the reality is that we measure our success by our to-do list, and things that we can put a number on, that we can quantify. We do this in research – being able to have objective results- objective vs. subjective. Obviously if I can put a number on it, and measure with a machine, that's going to be more valuable



to a healthcare provider than someone just saying they felt better. But the reality is that those are the life-changing changes. If you can improve someone's quality of life, and the tests still have the same numbers who cares? I mean, obviously, there's things, there's markers to look for that are significant, not to rule that out completely, but our experience of life is such a big part of health and wellness. Those little moments that we take, those two seconds that we take to be able to check in and notice our breathing, or take three minutes and just take a few deep breaths, and slow down and notice, its such a big part of self-care that it's easy to overlook because it's not an hour-long yoga practice or it's not going to the gym, or its not as tangible as what we eat, but I think it's the little things that we do that are so crucial to self-care.

Leslie: These are such beautiful reminders of the simplicity of how we can cultivate these patterns of caring for ourselves, of extending compassion to ourselves.

Tiffany: Yeah, I think of these as patterns. So the pattern starts with three minutes of yoga a day, or three minutes of meditation a day. Or maybe it's ten minutes of yoga. It's hard to do yoga in three minutes – but three minutes of meditation – you know, start somewhere. If and when, I always encourage people, don't increase that until you feel like you want more. Don't force yourself because the reality that we see in healthcare is the impactful things that we do are the things we do long-term. It's not the week-long diet we do, or cleanse we do, though those are helpful, the things that we do that are really impactful on our health long-term are the things that we do consistently. So, if I can just stick with ten minutes a day of something, that's going to be hugely impactful to my health longterm, than doing two hours of yoga for a few months and then being like 'gah! I can do this anymore, it's just so hard to fit into my schedule'.

I really encourage people to start with something that seems really easy for them. And that's all really your interpretation. Maybe three minutes of meditation seems really easy for you, and then only when you really want more, increase it, and just by a little bit. So it's just five minutes, then. So that there's a sense of not only being able to commit to it, but also that it's something that I'm welcoming in my life that I can start to see and feel the effects of at some point and really want to go back to. I always think it's really interesting working with people – many of the people I work with don't realize how bad they feel. For a lot of people, it's giving them that experience of what it feels like to start to feel good again. And once they start to feel that, that becomes their drug. That becomes like, 'I want that

thing' and that's the lifestyle behind the yoga and meditation. When you get a glimpse of what that feels like, it's hard to go back (laughs).

Leslie: That is true. That is so true. I actually just, before we came to talk together this morning, I was reading journals that my students turn in a couple times during the semester. At the beginning of the semester I ask them to select a contemplative practice to work with. It can be anything from yoga, meditation, breathwork, labyrinth walking, you get the idea. Interestingly enough, Tucson in particular has really become quite a rich community of healers. For a long time we had not just one, but two schools of acupuncture here, that finally merged together to one, and lots and lots of yoga in town. It's really amazing how, in the beginning, there is some skepticism in the journals, which is natural around starting out with a contemplative practice, and students are taking 21 credits, and working a job, and a million things going on – and now we're at that part in the semester where the journals are coming in and they're writing things like 'I'm connecting the dots now' (laughs) and 'this is changing me, and I'm able to handle stressful situations so much better'. It's really beautiful. It's my way of kind of coming in and pretend forcing (laughs) them to develop practices.

Tiffany: There's so much research now about the benefits of yoga and meditation now, which is great because its getting people to actually try it, but the reality is we don't really get it until we experience it. You know, once you have that tangible experience it does change your perspective a bit. It's cool to watch that. I did the practices without setting any expectations or any desire for things to be a certain way, but just watching how it evolves is the fun part of it (laughs).

Leslie: It is. It is fun. And I have to tell you again, that I'm really grateful to you, for you being such a big part of my own practices. I get a ton out of being able to take your classes on YogaGlo, and I've found exactly what you said about the balance– sometimes it will be one of your ten or twenty minute morning practices that I'll do, and I did your program that you did this summer, the one on strength and stamina, I actually did it on a loop for 45 days and it changed my life – it was awesome.

Tiffany: Wow!

Leslie: I really appreciate you. And I appreciate so much – I know how busy you are, how in-demand you are, and I'm so grateful that we were able to talk and share your wisdom and inspiration with everyone.



Tiffany: I was so excited to be asked by U of A! I loved living in Tucson, and I remember riding my bike to school – I didn't have a car then – and the heat, and the desert...it sounds awful actually, but there's so many wonderful memories for me there and it's really cool for me to connect with people who are there – struggling with the same things that I struggled with as a college student. We're all trying to find our way, and there's so many struggles and ups and downs and so much potential ahead. It's so cool to think about where all those students will be and all the changes that they'll be making in the world. If I can be helpful to anyone that makes me very happy.

Leslie: I'm sure you will continue to be!

Music outro

Leslie: Thanks for listening! We are so grateful to Tiffany for taking the time to talk with us and to share what she's working on with Yoga Medicine and this really innovative way to help bring support to healthcare and build a bridge between physicians and yoga teachers and yoga therapists. Weaving her training, her deep training, in yoga, anatomy, and Traditional Chinese Medicine. She's inspiring! She's one of many Wildcats that we are so proud of here at the U of A. It's so awesome for us to be able to highlight voices of compassion who have chosen this university as a place to pursue their higher education. I encourage you to learn more about Tiffany Cruikshank and her awesome work. You can check out her website, yogamedicine.com, and – like I do – you can practice with her online through yogaglo.com. To learn more about what we're up to at the Center for Compassion Studies, visit our website: [compassioncenter dot arizona dot edu](http://compassioncenter.arizona.edu).

This has been another episode of the University of Arizona's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Center for Compassion Studies 'Conversations on Compassion'.