

Sheena Nancy Sarles Interview

Karen Wyatt: [00:00:00] Today, I'm very happy to welcome my special guest, Sheena Nancy [00:01:00] Sarles, who is a yoga teacher, author, and longtime communicator whose work centers on meeting life as it is, especially in times of loss and transition.

With nearly a decade of experience teaching yoga through grief, she offers a gentle, embodied approach that blends breath, subtle movement, reflection, and nervous system regulation. She is the author and founder of Yoga for Living with Loss, a practice devoted to helping people stay present. A wife, mother, and grandmother, Sheena's work is rooted in lived experience, curiosity, and deep respect for the body's wisdom, honoring grief not as something to fix, but as something to skillfully live alongside.

And you can learn more at her website, yogaforlivingwithloss.com. So Sheena, welcome, and I'm so excited that you're here today to talk with me about yoga.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Thank you. I'm very happy to be here. I really enjoy your podcast, and I know [00:02:00] that you bring, comfort and information to so many of us, and much appreciated.

Karen Wyatt: thank you for that. And, I've been excited about this because I mentioned before we started that yoga has been part of my life for a long, time. I started doing it to videos, Rodney Yee videos, to be specific. Oh, I've taken

Sheena Nancy Sarles: with

Karen Wyatt: him. Back when I was in my 20s, I think. I st- I just started doing it, and then I've gone to several yoga retreats.

But it's just part of actually my everyday routine, and I cherish it. And so this is an exciting opportunity to get to talk to other people about the values of yoga, and now s- specifically through your work to tie it to grief. So I'm really grateful that we were able to connect.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah, this is great, and I'm very excited as well.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, so maybe you could start by telling us more about your own story. That's how I usually start most of these interviews and-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Okay. I, I had been a, [00:03:00] a dancer in a small company in my community, and, as I was aging and then the teacher changed direction, I was looking for another kind of movement.

And I was on the elliptical machine and said, this isn't how I want to spend my time." And a friend of mine said, "Do you want to try a yoga class with me?" And I was like, "Eh, what the heck?" And that was it. Walked through the door. my yoga teach- my dance teacher used to say, "Lift your sternum, and then I went to my first yoga class, and she said, "Open your heart."

And that's what, it became, and I was like, "Oh, man, that, that's it for me." so then I became a very avid student of yoga, taking lots of classes, and just was so amazed at my internal conversation. And I know at one class the teacher was saying, "Don't beat yourself up 'cause you can't balance," and I was like, "How'd she get in there?"

I was beating myself up 'cause I couldn't balance. So yoga just became very pervasive in every [00:04:00] aspect of my life. I got into breath and meditation, and the whole movement and alignment, of body, mind, and spirit, and it just, every part of it resonated for me. Then, as I was beginning my yoga, my father passed away, and I was completely bereft, the first person of my nuclear family.

And I found when I went to yoga class I didn't cry so much. I was like, "Oh, this is a little bit helpful." And then five years later when my mom passed away, I was deeply in my yoga practice and found I could find solace on the mat. Even in tears I could cry on the mat. I... It was just my heart was open, my body was responding, and that, it was just, really, helpful for me.

And then, in one very d- dramatic year, my husband had very intense heart surgery. He's fine now and all good. my best [00:05:00] friend of 42 years passed away of glioblastoma, and then s- three months later my bis- big sister died of lung cancer, and I was really bereft. That was, like, my people. and so I went to a grief writing workshop at our local hospice, which was really soothing, and it was, what color is your grief?

What animal is your grief? And I was just finishing my yoga teacher training, and everybody was like this because we protect our hearts. We're vulnerable. We're sad. You never see anybody go, "Hey, I'm sad," Everybody was very congested as I saw it. So at the end of one class, the executive director of that hospice said, "Oh, would you teach yoga for healing loss?"

And I I don't believe you heal from it. Becomes part of who you are, so we learn to live with it," which is why I named it Yoga for Living with Loss. And so from there, it just took off, and I [00:06:00] started, I real- grief is so enormous. But what I, what resonated for me was I could think about grief, and I could have my heart break about grief, but it was in my body.

It was w- it was not just, out there. it was within my body. So I, had been studying the chakras, which are these seven energy systems in our body that relate emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually, and even to our endocrine system and our hormones. And these are these very subtle energy systems that are the color of a rainbow, and each one holds incredible information about how we are.

We can look at our chakras and say, "Oh, this part of my body is feeling unbalanced," and so it gives information. And so I created Yoga for Living with Loss to be [00:07:00] related to the chakras. So it's a three-part yoga, chakras, grief. And they all come together in a way that can be very, very healing, very comforting, and very informational.

And as I like to say to my students, you're not going crazy, you're grieving.

Because we think we're going crazy.

Karen Wyatt: Wow. And we're

Sheena Nancy Sarles: grieving.

Karen Wyatt: That's, just such a beautiful story, and such wisdom as well about the grief we carry in our body. Because I think even for myself, as a long time griever over my dad's death by suicide, which happened when I was a lot younger, I never recognized until the last couple of years that I had been carrying that grief in my physical body for all of these years.

I'd done so much work emotionally and cognitively, all this healing work. Never had [00:08:00] I once looked at my own body un- until I actually- I developed, congestive heart failure, and I heard Francis Weller on a podcast interview saying, "Grief congests the heart." And suddenly that blew my mind open, oh, it's grief.

It's grief that's congesting my heart. I never f- pictured it within my body, and that completely changed everything for me as soon as I had that realization.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It is a revelation. I really talk about grief as congesting, and Yoga for Li- Living with Loss is a decongestant.

It really... We find out where it's, where it is and what we can do with it.

So what I offer people is, we, go through each of the chakras, and there's breath that we can do. There's a meditation. There's a gentle yoga movement. There are colors. There are foods. There are mantras. There are mudras, which are hand signals. So there's a [00:09:00] lot of places to, to put our grief and say, oh, this is what that is.

This is how I can... grief is not something to remedy, it's something to incorporate And I always say that when people told me they lost their sibling or their sister, I would say, "Oh, that's too bad." And then I lost my sister, and it was completely different. It was completely different. And we know there, there are no words.

you can just... You're, either in that tribe or you're not, and if you're in the tribe, you get it, and if you're not in the tribe, good for you, your day will come. That's will... And we all grieve everything. we grieve loss of loved ones. We grieve transitions, moving, job, pets, global situations.

I feel that we all... We have a, a piece of grief in us at most, most of the time. sometimes it overwhelms us, and sometimes it's a detail, and we get to be aware of where it is- [00:10:00]

and what you can do with it.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's so wise, that w- we're- ... always carrying it. And, I appreciate that you were describing that yoga was helpful to you with acute- when you were acutely grieving shortly after the death.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: And then for me, I found years later, y- when I was aware, oh gosh, I'm still carrying all of this grief, and I never recognized it. I never tuned in that it was in my body. It still helped me all these years later. Yes. So it seems like it's a practice that we can... Maybe we use it differently at different stages of our grief or different times.

our grief

Sheena Nancy Sarles: ebbs and flows.

I think that's part of it, that, when there's the initial grief and then you move on and you find different things. I can give you one little anecdote. So I woke up one morning. I'm a pretty physically fit person. I walk and do yoga and ride my bike and kayak, and I couldn't walk.

My hip was frozen. And I was like, "What is this?" [00:11:00] So I went to my friend who's a chiropractor, and she's doing all her things, and she's I'm not seeing anything, but why don't you come back tomorrow?" And I'm like hobbling around. Wake up the next morning, no different. Go to my friend. She's doing all of her adjustments, and she goes, "All right.

What, what's going on? 'Cause it's not in your body." And I said, "My birthday's coming, and I'm going to be older than my sister ever was."

And I cried my eyes out.

Karen Wyatt: Wow.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: And then I walked out pain-free.

Karen Wyatt: Wow.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: That was, to me- ... okay, do you get it now? and hips hold emotions and, guilt and, oh, and we can go through that as well.

But that's why I find the chakras such a great way to meet grief because it's so informational.

Karen Wyatt: And yeah, let's do go through the chakras, 'cause... And I wanted to emphasize, they're energy systems within the body. 'Cause I, know to some people that sounds very [00:12:00] mysterious or strange when we talk about chakras, but, but you can describe it better, what they are, what-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: they're, wheels of energy in different colors, and they go up your spine and around your body, and they've been studied for thousands and thousands of years.

And we like to say that, the chakras are like love. They're everywhere, but you can't see it.

You can feel them, but you can't touch them. They're not of this world. But they exist, and when you combine them with Eastern medicine and Western medicine, you can really get a lot of information.

Maybe before you, you take the pill or get the Band-Aid, you maybe can, actually take a look at what your chakras are saying. The chakras are these seven energy systems, and they start at your root. From your toes to your coccyx to your perineum, your legs, this is all your root chakra. And the [00:13:00] color is re- red and the, the element is earth, and it's our grounding.

In our grief, we are ungrounded. We have lost that stability, that security, that I knew this person was gonna be next to me, and they're not next to me anymore. I had this job, and now I don't have it anymore. very ungrounded. When you have too much root chakra, you're so sedentary you can't move. When you have not enough root chakra, you're so spacey your feet hardly touch the ground.

So we're always looking for the balance and the harmony, the inhale and the exhale, the rootedness, the balance. And the sh- the shadow side of this chakra is fear. How can I go on? W- the ground has shifted beneath my feet. So what we do is we do gentle breathwork that really focuses on our lower body.

We, can eat red foods, [00:14:00] beets and cherries and all kinds of things to ground us. and we do movements of, tapping your feet, moving your legs. we say, "I'm weak in the knees," this is all root chakra. When someone has something to tell you and they say, "Sit down," because you know you can't be held.

And I look at our legs as, two plugs of the p- two prongs of the plug into the earth. And so that's where our steadiness, our rockiness is. And so if we do some movements, really just shake your legs, touch the ground, really move your legs around and get that kind of fascia moving, get the energy moving, we can feel more grounded.

And we just have that presence, that awareness, oh, I'm feeling ungrounded. Maybe I should just take a little walk. Maybe I need to just, really focus on my legs.

People that have knee problems, it's all, the fear of moving forward, the fear of getting stuck. So [00:15:00] the root chakra gives us a tremendous amount of information.

root chakra's about rituals. It's about when someone passes, we have funerals, we have wakes, we have shiva, we have all these rituals of grounding. So many people never go to their spiritual home, their, where they were brought up, and then someone dies, and all of a sudden you gotta go to church. You gotta go to synagogue.

Gotta go to the mosque. You gotta go 'cause that's our grounding. That's our root. That's, what keeps us solid. And so when we know that and we feel off balance, we can go into study of a root chakra, do some movements, do some breathwork, and feel ourselves return to some groundedness. And I can't emphasize enough, we don't fix it We embrace it and we move through it and with it.

We don't p- I like to say whatever we push away, what re- we resist persists. So if we keep pushing it away, it's just gonna stay there. So bring it [00:16:00] in. Bring it in and feel it. And maybe a little gratitude for the feeling. Maybe that's okay that you're a feeling person and you're becoming more knowledgeable.

And in each of the breathwork that we do, we're present, and then we see we wandered off, so we're aware, and then we come back and we return. So grieving is a, an ongoing process. Once we lose some- a beloved particular, we, don't get over it. We just embrace it, and we don't talk about it 'cause people don't wanna hear it, so we gotta find our, tribes.

So that's the first chakra.

Karen Wyatt: I wanted to say too, you were saying the shadow side is fear, and I think for s- sometimes fear actually pushes us in the wrong direction. It makes us think, "Oh no, something ... I need to stay still. I need to stay at home. I need to, wait here," which is the opposite maybe of what we actually need when we need movement.

We need to go out for the walk

Sheena Nancy Sarles: or move. We need to move. [00:17:00]

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: and we definitely need ... I think of movement as medicine And we have to move and find out, I am off balance, so I'm gonna do something, else with that." I also know, wanna always express there is no timeline on grief.

You might not feel your sh- root chakra today, and you might feel it in five years. And there are no rules. You have to find your comfort zone. And a lot of it is people telling you what to do, but you really have to listen to your own body-

and say, "Oh, my body needs to be still. My body needs to move. I need to shake it out.

I need to take a nap." And becoming more aware of how we are moving in the world or not moving can give us the information, and we b- have to get very discerning about which advice we take.

Karen Wyatt: So that, that's such a good point. There's no prescription that can be written for us. We have to figure it out.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: We, [00:18:00] we do.

By connecting and listening to our own body. That's, it's our, it's, we're all on our own journey. And while u- grief is universal, our own grief is, nobody knows what we're going through at this moment. I was in the grocery store and I heard this song and I started to cry. Everybody else was just buying eggs and milk, but this is, that's where it landed for me at that moment.

And it goes into other chakras, but we learn to be very compassionate towards others because we want that compassion back-

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes ...

Sheena Nancy Sarles: as we're doing this. So d- do you want me to go through each of the chakras like that? Yes. Yeah, please do. Okay. So this is, a broad overview, and, I do have a book and all that to, g- that dives a lot deeper.

So the second chakra is located around the hips. The first one is Muladhara root. The second chakra is orange, and it's in, encircles your hips, your lower belly, and your sacrum. It's called the sacral chakra, Svadhisthana. This is about [00:19:00] pleasure, sensuality, flow, and movement. Where the first chakra is about earth, the second chakra's about water.

Just the opposite. Where the first chakra is very solid, this one is all fluid, all moving, all connection. And in grief, we've lost a connection. It gets blocked. We have, pleasure and then we start, the shadow side is guilt.

How can I feel, how can I go to this party when is p- passed? And so many people feel they shouldn't do things because they're grieving and they have this guilt about their actions.

So the color is orange, the energy is flow, movement, connection, sensuality, passion. And all of this is in our hips, and hips hold all of our emotion, as I said in my other story. So when you feel those hips and the lower backache, that's because you're not feeling connected. You're blocking it. You want to pull it in.

[00:20:00] And this water, I ... it's all around us, but the water is about our tears. I, it, and our tears have different chemistry than if we get something in our eye, which I find so fascinating, that we ... It's all that water, all that juice. And w- and when we stop that flow, we paralyze ourselves, and so we want to keep it flowing.

And it's again, when we feel disconnected, when we feel we don't have anybody to connect with, where's our people? We come back and we do a breath, and we breathe into our hips, and we move our hips around a little bit, and we do what we can to just move it out, just in any way that we can. And we have orange foods.

We have carrots and oranges and, peaches. And we get, become aware, I need more of my second chakra. I need more sacral. I need more flow. I need more water. And so it gives you that information. are you feeling dry in your hips?

[00:21:00] Drink. Give yourself that movement. try to keep it going.

And as I said, the shadow side is this guilt for feeling good. So we, say, "Oh, no. I, don't, want to feel good." It's when we walk into a wake or something and people ... And, you get nervous 'cause you're going through the door of this sad time, and everybody's laughing. And you're like, "Oh, my God.

What's going on here?" And it's because our bodies won't stay there, won't stay in that depth. And so we have to have that joy. It's where joy lives. And we want to give ourselves whatever joy we can through our breath, through our movement. And hips are funny. A lot of people have hip stuff, and so there's some very gentle movements to do that, to work that through.

So that's the second chakra. And the shadow might be I can't, I can't regulate what I feel. My emotions are overwhelming. So when your emotions are overwhelming, you have to just bring in your stillness.

And like too [00:22:00] much water is you're all over the place. You're emotionally everywhere, all over the place. Nobody knows where you are. The, a- and if you have too little of this, you're isolated, you're frozen. You don't share with anybody. You don't connect. You withdraw. Some of that's a little good, some of it's not so good, so you, want to do the ebb and flow.

And I think the biggest message is that grief is not in one stage. It is always moving. It's always changing. Sometimes you're very surprised about where the change is. And so sometimes you just say, "Wait, let me just, let me back up here and think about where it is." Sometimes people are so overwhelmed with grief, they're just like, "Oh, my God," and then you say, "Where is it exactly?"

And that gives you a pause. We just want to pause. We want to self-regulate. We want to self-regulate our nervous system. We want to do what we can to stay in that, place of presence without [00:23:00] judgment.

And that's a big one.

Karen Wyatt: and, it sounds like you're emphasizing that grief is not linear. It doesn't follow a certain process.

So it isn't like we'll start ... It'll start with the first chakra, and then move to the second, and then the third, and fourth.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It doesn't do that. No.

Karen Wyatt: It's every-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It's,

for all of us to say, "Oh, look where it is today. Isn't that interesting?"

Karen Wyatt: Okay.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: I think, who knew that?" So that's our second chakra.

That's lower belly, lower back, hips, all that emotion, all that stuff. Then we move up to the third chakra, which is Manipura, and it's located just between your, navel and your lowest rib, and that's your solar plexus, and it's the middle of your back. And the element for Manipura is fire.

It's our motivation, our self-esteem, our courage.

for me, this Manipura is what my Yoga for Living with Loss is all about. What do I do with this [00:24:00] grief energy? So I created this class. That's my Manipura. the color is yellow, and it is the sunlight. It is the brightness, and you can't see when the sun is in your eyes, but you can see when it's lighting a path in front of you.

So it's the light from within. It's our fire, it's, And our tears can dampen that fire. So we wanna be aware of it. W- where is it in me? What's happening? And people, when someone might pass in a family, there'll be one person that says, "Okay, I got the caterer, I got the clothes, I got the program.

Let's go." The other one says, "I'll see you, I'm going to bed. I, can't deal with any of it." And it's all okay. It's Manipura. It's, the solar plexus, it's this fire, it's this courage, it's self-esteem, and it's, identification of who we are. And when someone passes, who are we? [00:25:00] There's no word for loss of sibling, like an orphan or a widow.

There's no, there are no words for it. But, here it is. I'm different. Who am I now? How do I define myself? Where is my courage? And when I ... People come to my class, I say, "Just bring your courage and your curiosity," 'cause that's what it takes to meet this flame This is what it takes. And so we don't wanna dampen it, we don't wanna put the fire out, but we do wanna regulate it.

So there's lots of ways we can do it. It's through movement, which is another ... So we do things really abdominal. We do some, like, twists and turns and detoxifying. Nothing too harsh, just enough to give us information. Oh, this is where it's settled. This is why I have an ulcer. This is why things are not going so well.

first chakra you might have diarrhea and, weak knees. second chakra you might have lower back pain and, some kind of digestive issues. That's the same [00:26:00] thing with this third chakra. It's right at your intestine, your colon, what's going on? So this information is so helpful 'cause you're not going crazy, you're grieving.

And so this is our fire. So we have earth, water, fire. These are our lower chakras. The information is that we are grieving and it settles. Where has it settled today? What ... And people are like, "I'm going out of my mind. I don't know what to do." Look at it. Investigate. It's about being curious. I think that when

Yoga has taught me, and I'm probably you get to observe who you are. You get to witness, "Oh, this is where my grief is today. That's interesting. I just don't feel like seeing anybody." That's fine. That's, you're n- that's where you are today. Too much fire and you're too aggressive. You want, you're grabbing it all.

Too little fire, you're, like, totally isolated, totally [00:27:00] pulled in. You don't wanna do anything. You have low self-esteem. And the shadow side of this is shame.

Whereas the first chakra's about fear, the second chakra's about guilt, I shouldn't be having fun or what did I do wrong? The third chakra is about who I am, shame about I'm not a good partner.

I didn't do enough for my beloved. What if anybody finds out? There's a lot of shame around grief, and it's very normal, and what we can do is move through it, move with it, and really investigate it. So many times we don't wanna get introspective 'cause it's a little painful, but only you know, so you can go deep and find that out.

Karen Wyatt: It's so interesting to me that this physical information is really helpful and important, even if, say, if you're in therapy for grief and you're identifying emotional issues that have been present for a long time, like guilt or shame, to also be able to locate it in your physical body and s- and see it [00:28:00] and recognize it in your body- Yeah

it just seems so valuable when you put all of that together.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah. Yeah. The information of our bodies is pretty ... I find fascinating. And as I said, earlier, the, the chakras give us so much information. It's, amazing. It's fantastic. All we have to do is give ourselves a little time to, see what that's all about.

So that's the third chakra. That's Manipura, fire. So now those are the three kind of mundane , physical parts of our chakras. Then we move up to where the grief really lives, in our heart. This is our heart chakra, not at the physical heart, at the center of your chest at the heart.

This is Anahata. The color is green, and it's where our grief really lives. When someone's grieving, they hold their heart. That's when we pray. What we're all about, our heart chakra. And, the energy is not ... Now we've left the [00:29:00] physicality. The energy of our heart chakra is air. It's like love, it's everywhere.

You just have to tap into it. walking in nature is very helpful 'cause it's green. if you have too much of this heart chakra, you're just ... Everybody's ... You, just have to get everybody into wherever you are into your heart, like you're just bleeding heart. You're open-hearted. It's, a lot. If you have too little, you close it down.

There's broken heart syndrome, which I think you were talking about. There's that, people ... There's so many words, heartache, sweetheart, broken-hearted, you know, hard-hearted, open-hearted. But this is all where grief centers. and the thing that we always have to remember about grief, particularly in our heart, is compassion for ourselves.

It's hard. Grief is hard. It's y- you have to have self-compassion. [00:30:00] You don't feel good today, you're sad today, you're mad, you're in denial, all those steps, have compassion. It's okay. It's hard. There's a loss. It's not easy. And, I think I talked about the too much and then the too little is hard-hearted.

Don't, want to let anybody in. I'm never going to fall in love again. I'm never gonna ... And it's about having compassion for, what people say to you. Are you over it yet? Do you have other children? How old was your mother? It's oh my God, none of that matters. But you have to have compassion for other people, and that, that's how that works.

That, it's a lot of self-compassion.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. I love that you talk about self-compassion, 'cause I really feel in our society self-compassion is undervalued in, a lot of ways. sometimes we think of that as being selfish or self-focused, and we don't even quite understand what that means. Having compassion for ourselves [00:31:00] doesn't mean that we're, being lazy or we're making excuses for ourselves. It's just simply this ability , to hold our ourselves in love, and our own pain, and, recognize the depth of that.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Honoring. Honoring who we are. And I always like to ask people, if you're uncomfortable with honoring yourself, how would you, how do you honor other people?

Bring that right back. That's what we want. And breathing is hard. and we just, and then we go into the greens. Eat, kale, eat salad, have grapes. You just, there's a lot of ways to touch it. And then we breathe into our heart. We touch our heart. there's a lot I'm gonna show you.

Just a lot, like a heart movement. You would just do this or tap on your heart. get into, get in touch with it. Breathe into your heart. Do a different kind of breathwork. There's all kinds. And arms are also ... your heart is all your circulation, so it's your hands. You shake your hands out. You do anything you can to move around this area.

It can just ... This is, [00:32:00] like your chest and your shoulders, your arms, your hands, everything in circulation. one of the things when you're feeling really, deeply in grief, stand up and shake everything. Shake your head, your hands, your booty, your legs, everything. Shake it out, because you get the circulation going and then your heart opens, and it's all related.

It's just ... I, always find it so fascinating that it's all related. This is all about love, and we don't grieve deeply if we haven't loved deeply. So there's a lot of gratitude about heartache.

Karen Wyatt: I think that's a great, take-home message for someone to listen to. It doesn't have to be complicated, and you don't have to study all the chakras and know what they're about.

But taking home simple things like the breath and, movement and shaking the body. Yeah. don't forget those things and how valuable they can be.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: And we always forget. We for- I need to remind myself all the [00:33:00] time. I go through my own yoga classes. your hips. Where's the alignment?

Where are your legs? scoop your tailbone. All that kind of stuff. We have to constantly remind ourselves, which is why I am a big believer that a meditation is very v- it's vital to grieving. You have to be quiet. And that monkey mind that everybody talks about? We all have it. It's just taming the monkey, and it's about being, finding that stillness within, and then we can be still on the exterior.

And we want to keep it all flowing. We want the circulation to be moving. We don't want to stiffen up, because grief will congest us. How do we open it up? And it's really simple. It's really not hard. Just have to be aware. And there's a lot of awareness about grief. How am I feeling? Not so great?

Which part? What part doesn't feel good? And then what do we do with it? And what's it telling us? Oh, I know. I'm [00:34:00] feeling a little guilty. Maybe, what am I thinking about? I feel a little fearful. Where am I? So it's a w- really,

the whole yoga for living with loss is about not judging- but opening up to the opportunities to learn more about who you are and how you're doing this.

Karen Wyatt: And I liked you emphasized before being curious, so it's recognizing you, you don't have all the answers right now. You, you-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah ...

Karen Wyatt: you can't see all of it clearly. You only, you can just learn what you can learn in the moment by paying attention.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah. And holding what you hold and letting go of what you don't.

A- I think i- in the overview, self-compassion and non-judgment, that's how we're gonna ... That's the grieving process. And, allowing it to happen, not putting it away. s- in our society, you can lose your mother on a Friday, and you go back to work on a Monday. in olden times and other times, you would rip your clothing.

You would wear [00:35:00] a certain color. You would ... People would understand you're not in your right mind. We have a friend that says, "Everybody gets a year. Whatever they say or do doesn't matter." And it's true, 'cause you're out of, you're literally out of your mind. And so that's, where our heart is.

The green, the air, the nature, the love.

and obviously the, shadow side of this heart chakra is grief. This, this enormous, heavy, grief, this weight in our pocket, this, just pulling us down. So we have to pull up when we can. So now we're gonna go to our fifth chakra, our throat chakra, and this color is blue. It's Vishuddha, and it's our expression, our creativity, our communication.

it's my weak spot. When, I'm not, in balance, I get laryngitis.

And I, [00:36:00] know exactly where it goes. So we wanna keep this open. This is this most narrow passage in our body. It's our expression. It's our creativity. Our... Do you cook? Do you paint? How do you dress? however you express yourself, in your dance, your movement, your entertaining, your love language, this is all throat chakra.

We decorate our necks. We... It's all... My husband thinks I was guillotined in another life 'cause I'm always wearing a scarf all winter long. But i- this is where we speak. It's where we express. It's where we wail, where we cry, where we scream. I have a friend whose husband's quite ill, and she said, "Can we go for a scream walk?"

And we just go and go to the ocean and scream. And, we loosen it up. We loosen it up. this is where we express, and we express love. We communicate in all different kinds of ways. The [00:37:00] shadow side of throat chakra is lying, gossiping. You can tell when someone's not telling the truth by their s- by the way they talk.

So the, excessive throat chakra is talking, gossiping, just never getting a word in edgewise, and we've all met those people. And then the opposite are

Karen Wyatt: the

Sheena Nancy Sarles: weak voice, little voice, that you can hardly hear them. that's, a deficient throat chakra. And we wanna open it up. We can just do simple neck rolls.

What does that feel like? We can s- you know, yell, "Ah," just keep it moving. We wanna just express. We wanna keep it open. And, in our grief, though, there are no words. And I always talk about when people say, I... they don't wanna say anything when you've lost someone, and the most potent thing you can say to someone is, "There are no words.

I'm so sorry." People say, "I don't know what to say." Don't [00:38:00] say anything. It, and that's when you listen to people. It's your ears. You wanna hear the sounds. you wanna be present to what's going on. And then as I was saying before, you wanna be very discerning when people say things to you that are so uncomfortable.

Do you have other children? what would that matter if you lost a child? But you, then you have to go back into the compassion of what you hear, and voices that you wanna hear. I, have grandchildren, and I like to tell them st- my father was a foot doctor, so I like to tell them that Papa Seymour fixed the monster's feet.

And then they say, "Tell me a Papa Seymour story." And I hear them say my father's name, and I'm delighted. And this is also the other piece, is that when we're in grief, the people, maybe not so much our inner circle, but the rest, don't

mention the person's name. [00:39:00] Now, if you lost particularly a child, but anyone, we want them to be remembered.

We wanna hear and speak their names, their voices. It's like someone, I don't wanna say anything you might remember." Like I forgot. We don't forget. We wanna hear their name. So I always encourage people, when you meet someone who's had a loss, ask them their name, 'cause everybody wants to say their name.

If it brings tears, so what? Tears- laughter. What does it matter?

Karen Wyatt: And maybe from that fifth chakra, we want to tell stories about them. We, we- We want to talk about them and need to.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: And we have to find our supportive community, be a little discerning, but also talk about them. in any way that you can.

My mother's recipe, my father used to sail here, or whatever. We wanna remember, and we want them to be remembered. and, s- it just, it's just [00:40:00] how it keeps going. That's how it keeps going. These are the oral stories, and we talk about the past, and we have family histories. And we just, wanna stay creating and communicating with our loved ones.

And so this is our throat chakra, blue. Blueberries. what other foods are blue? we wanna find blue foods and wear blue colors, and just, have that openness. And you can do ... Just open your, you can really open your throat. There's a, a great pose in yoga that's called lion's pose. You just exhale and open your mouth and stick out your tongue, and you get rid of it.

You release it. Stiff necks. you're not expressing yourself. You could take any ailment and bring it back to a chakra, which is so fascinating to me. It's just so fascinating. they say my sister's lung cancer was unexpressed grief. It was right there. Who knows? Who [00:41:00] knows? but we, try to be as informative.

We know that it's not linear, and we know that we're not going crazy 'cause we're grieving.

Karen Wyatt: Exactly, and, it's, all of those things. It's in the physical body. It's emotional, mental, spiritual, all of those things together. And I'll just say we're not saying any of this as an alternative to getting medical care, because- Oh, No, no ... we still need medical evaluations on all of that, and treatment. But this is

something that gets left out often when we are receiving medical care, this type of information about the body.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Yeah. No, I would never negate our doctors. We l- we need them. We love them. But we just wanna have various viewpoints, various perspectives on what might be going on.

Karen Wyatt: Exactly.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: That's ... It just gives us another, another resource. That's how I see it. Another, another resource. And if people go, "Ooh-wah, ooh-wah," [00:42:00] so let ... So be it.

Karen Wyatt: Yes.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: So be it. then we get to what I find ... I love this chakra. This is the sixth chakra. It's between your brows and up in your forehead, and this is your third eye.

Ajna. And this is our knowledge, our intuition, our all-knowing, our... And the, energy where the energy in the throat chakra is sound, the energy of our third sh- third eye chakra is sight.

And it's our two eyes look out, and our third eye looks in. It's our insight, our intuition, our, clairvoyance, our clarity, our...

where we meditate, where where things happen in our lives as, like I, I, my leg hurts. In our, third eye, we get the narrative, oh, we're feeling unsteady. We're feeling unbalanced. So this is where the [00:43:00] narration to our life all happens. the, the shadow side of this third chakra is illusions.

Trying to see things as they are not. Joan Didion wrote the beautiful book, The Year of Magical Thinking. Her husband died right in front of her, and she saved his shoes for when he came home.

So that's our illusions. We, This isn't... Wait. Wait, This is not what I wanted. Wait, This is not, how it's supposed to be. but we go back to, the definition of what's Buddhism. Everything changes It's hard to incorporate, but it's true. Everything changes. So our third eye is that intuition, that clairvoyance, that clarity, that all-knowing. And the, shadow side, the, the excessive is a know-it-all.

It's right where it comes from. They know everything. And the [00:44:00] shadow side is these illusions and, not, being aware, not trusting. and we just tap it. and the Indian women put their bindi right there. This is the... and when we're thinking, we automatically do this or do this. We, just do that, and if we tap it, it wakes it up a little bit.

We wanna just tap, tap, And, the color is purple, and we eat purple foods, and we can wear purple lights, see purple lights. We meditate on a... We meditate from our third eye, so we might meditate in seeing a purple gem, seeing something purple coming to us. It's our intuition. It's our knowledge.

It's, just how we see the world and how we see ourselves. It's introspection, and it's also how we see everything around us. Now, sometimes it can get misinterpreted, but this is where we want our [00:45:00] clarity. This is where we meditate for clarity. the color's purple. Purple foods, purple shoes, purple whatever.

I wear a lot of purple, that's one that's really important to me, and it's all about our sight and our clarity of sight.

Karen Wyatt: And you mentioned the third eye looks inward, but I can imagine it, it can get blocked so that we can't really see ourselves. We don't see ourselves- Correct ... clearly. Correct. And then that's a huge obstacle, A huge obstacle

to actually moving forward or, just understanding yourself, why you are experiencing this, why you're going through it, if you're not able to see within. And it seems like that, that's a good thing to be aware of.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: W- one of the best, methods for clearing that is journaling. Write it out. Wi- be- bear witness to yourself.

And I think what we learn in yoga and through the chakras is to step [00:46:00] outside of ourselves and witness, observe. Not necessarily judgment, but not be in the middle of it all the time. So I think that's, correct, that we don't see ourselves clearly. What are our masks? What aren't we seeing? And if you have a therapist or a really close friend, you can ask them.

what do I, what, where... we can't see in, y- we never see our own faces, right?

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: We only see them in the mirror. So we need to really have people maybe trusting, who, tell me, where, what am I, where are my blocks? What am I not seeing? That's why people go to therapy and, have, take walks with their friends, to get a different perspective.

This is all third eye, all that clarity, perspective, different vision. And we, our eyes. what is it, the clarity of eyes? the eyes are what the, the windows to the soul. it's all, all that third eye. it's where we are, and where we're at, where [00:47:00] our headaches go- headaches go, migraines, all of that, that congestion, that waking up and just, "Oh, man."

those first moments when we first wake up and we forget about our loss are those beautiful first four or five seconds. And then we're like, "Oh yeah, this is really, this is what's happened." So that third eye is a beautiful place to breathe into and to medi- meditate on, and to just open it up.

what's congesting and what's opening? How can I just physically open it up? Give yourself a nice face massage, physically opening it up.. And then we're gonna go to the crown chakra, and the crown chakra is white, and I see it as the halo over your head.

I see it as the white light. And, if you look at these, m- paintings from, , every area, there's a light shining. These religious ones have the light. It's the light. The element is [00:48:00] ether. it's the ethers. It's, out there. It's everywhere. And the crown chakra is our connection to the divine.

It's where, we, hope to connect, if that is in our practice or in our belief system, to connect to whatever is bigger and out there. it's where we pray. It's where we listen. It's that connection. people that are excessive in this just pray all the time. They just wanna go to church, go to temple, go anywhere, just pray.

Don't do anything else. Just study, and that's all they do. The people that have deficient in this chakra are the cynics. I don't believe any of it. This is it. It do- that, that stuff doesn't matter. So we wanna always find the harmony and the balance, but it's also a place where we meditate, what, else do I need to know?

That ... My favorite meditation is what do I need to [00:49:00] hear? That's what I like to ... where am I in this world? And so when we wanna communicate with our loved ones, this is our seventh chakra, our connection to the divine. I have a feeling they're near me. I swear I heard their voice. This is all crown chakra.

It's our enlightenment It's where, where it all comes together. And so we wanna be open-minded. We wanna have all that. I spend time in Bali, and in Bali, when a child is born and has this soft spot on their crown, they feel that's a very sacred space, and they feel that these children, infants, newborns, do not have the capacity to, to deal with any evil.

So their feet don't touch the ground for three months. And you see all these grandfathers walking around holding these newborns. And then there's a, a literally a ceremony for baby [00:50:00] landing when their feet- Huh ... touch the ground.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, interesting.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It's cool. And it's that soft spot. So the crown, we cover, people, we wear hats.

Religious leaders all t- cover their head. This is a very sacred space, and I always like to do a lot of this tapping because it opens you up, and it tingles everywhere in your body, and I always laugh. I say, "People, when they do this a long time, they get more IQ points." So we wanna tap our heads.

Be open-minded, open, open to thoughts. And you don't wanna, negate what anybody else says. You wanna, have a little, openness, open-mindedness and, all of that. And the color is white, and, people in mourning wear white. Pe- brides wear white, It's, the color is, all of, the, all of the colors together in the prism bring us white, which is why it's the very top. So we have red, orange, yellow, [00:51:00] green, blue, purple, white. Earth, water, fire, air, sound, sight, enlightenment.

We have all these different energies around us. Lower body, hips, belly, heart, throat, eyes, top of head.

So the chakras give us all this information as we navigate our grief. And once we step into grief, we navigate it forever. It isn't that we've done our work for six months or one year or five years. It's sharp and it fades. Sometimes I miss the sharpness, 'cause it makes you feel closer to the loss.

You don't, you it's hard that you c- get used to it. It doesn't go away, and you get used to it in different ways. But, it's always with us, and it's ... We're humans, and that's part of our experience. And, [00:52:00] it's just ... Grief is a, is the human part of the human condition. We all are gonna get it. We all will be living with it, and what we do with it is our choice.

We embrace it, we, think about it, we move through it, we honor it, and we do our best.

Karen Wyatt: It's just so helpful to have this perspective, and to really understand the chakras in the body, what they do for us, and also how grief might affect each, each chakra level. But I was thinking, it seems to me that a lot of yoga teachers are, not aware of the effects of grief, or may not have studied that as you have to be able to apply it.

But I'm thinking maybe they should, because-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: they- ...

Karen Wyatt: probably-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Everybody's bringing something into their yoga class.

Karen Wyatt: E- exactly. And how many students in their class are [00:53:00] actually carrying in grief, and if it was just acknowledged or spoken about- how helpful that might be.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It would ... Yeah, it's very helpful.

I was teaching at hospice, and a woman who had recently lost her husband came, and her sister accompanied her 'cause her sister had practiced yoga, and she was very supportive. And it was very sweet that these two sisters came. The sister that accompanied her, about four or five weeks in said, I lost two sons, but I've never really dealt with it."

Karen Wyatt: Wow.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: You don't know what anybody else is carrying. Which was, I, repeat that often because nobody knows what anybody else is carrying. And yes, grief is part of all of us, and I think people are not, knowledgeable about it, so they're afraid of it. It's not contagious.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. So true. honestly, in no matter what kind of work we do, it helps us to be aware of [00:54:00] grief and how grief might be affecting the people that, that we work with.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Exactly ...

Karen Wyatt: I love too that y- you brought up how helpful yoga is, but people don't necessarily have to know complicated poses or postures.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Not at all. You've

Karen Wyatt: mentioned

Sheena Nancy Sarles: things

Karen Wyatt: like- So- Yeah, breathing- Can I

Sheena Nancy Sarles: show my book? ... and moving. Yes, Please show your book. So this is my book. Whoops. Yoga for Living with Loss.

And what I have in the back, I have yoga movements for each chakra, and they're very simple. if we reach our arms up and open, that's yoga. it's embodied breath and movement. That's what yoga is. Now, if you want to stand on your head and do cartwheels, have at it. But it's basically coordinating breath and movement with awareness, and that takes us really far.

And that's why yoga is ... I, find yoga so fabulous. There's so many different kinds of yoga, and so many different yoga poses, and so many different [00:55:00] modifications that... And now, obviously with YouTube, there are a million, ways to access it. And I also have a video series on YouTube, and I'm happy to share that with anybody that emails me.

And I think you're going to put my information-

Karen Wyatt: Yes ...

Sheena Nancy Sarles: in the

Karen Wyatt: chat. Yes, in the show notes. Yeah ... because that sounds really wonderful. 'Cause it, it would be hard for someone not familiar with yoga to, to take just what we've talked about here and apply it to their own lives. But those videos- Right

and your book, it seems would be really helpful.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: yoga is always thought of as this very physical, which it is, but that's a part of it. It's a lot of meditation, it's a lot of breath, it's a lot of

presence, it's a lot of awareness. it's a way of being. It's not like the step machine that you go on and step off.

when you start to practice yoga, it becomes a, a, a part of who you are and how [00:56:00] you meet everything with, s- a little bit more awareness. That's what it is. Presence.

Karen Wyatt: And you mentioned that you were teaching yoga to a, I think it was a hospice group. it just seems to me like it's perfect for a grief group or a, yeah, hospice bereavement group or people coming together- to do... They're probably the simplest things you could do together as a group just to help get people into their bodies a little bit, to recognize- the physical- component of grief.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: I, think simple breathwork. You inhale, hold it, exhale. we could just do a little now. you inhale, and you inhale to be full, and you hold it, and then you exhale to empty, and you have the emptiness.

You inhale to be present. You exhale to soften. you inhale to be present. You exhale to be distracted. So [00:57:00] that's yoga. Simple breathwork. and it's just a beauti- there are many spokes in the wheel. For me, it's a very beautiful spoke because it's so adaptable to any age, any body, any level of fitness or, lack thereof.

We can all sit and stamp our feet on the floor, most of us. we can all lift our arms and open it up. We can touch our hearts. We can tap our third eye. we can rock back and forth. I think what yoga has a little bit of a, a tale of, you have to be an expert. You have to be really flexible.

You have to be all these things that you don't. And, it's interesting because we want to be flexible in body and mind. We want to be strong in body and mind. And that's where the yoga comes in.

It's not just one place one way.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, that's just so [00:58:00] powerful. And I, I hope everyone listening recognizes what a wonderful tool yoga could be.

And even if it's a matter of, a hospice worker at the bedside with the patient helping them take deep breaths and inhale- and exhale, to lessen their anxiety and feel calmer, even that, how powerful that simple tool- could be.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: It is. I teach people at the red light. You can breathe at the red light.

Y- you don't need road rage. You don't have to be impatient. we-- the breath is, i- we all have a breath, so we may as well use it,

Karen Wyatt: Yes, exactly. Well-

Sheena Nancy Sarles: You don't have to go buy it. No equipment needed.

Karen Wyatt: Gosh, I can't believe a whole hour has gone by already. It's been such a fun conversation- Well-

that we've had, Sheena. And I'll remind everyone, your website is yogaforlivingwithloss.com, and that's also the name of the book. But I'll have links for the website and for where to get the book and how to get in touch with [00:59:00] you in the

Sheena Nancy Sarles: show notes. It's all on my website, and there's a video series, and there's some free classes.

And, so my book is in digital and hard copy. I do sell it, but I'm happy to offer it for a donation or free. I would rather people have it than have any obstacle financially.

Karen Wyatt: Aw.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: So come to my website. My email's there. Shoot me an email. Say, "I want it for free." I'll give it to you. "I'll pay half," whatever.

I just really want to get it out there. And, and just for everyone to know that we're all grieving. You're not alone. You're not alone. We're h- we're-- you're in large company, and a lot of self-compassion and self-love can take you not a- not around it, but through it.

Karen Wyatt: So very true. Oh, thank you so much, for sharing this.

It's really been wonderful to learn from you.

Sheena Nancy Sarles: Thank you so much. It was my pleasure [01:00:00] to be here, and I'm happy to share this information.

Karen Wyatt: yeah, I'm looking forward to staying in touch, and I'm gonna watch your videos, your- Okay ... yoga videos. Have at it. I can't wait to add them to my little repertoire that I do- Okay

during the day.