

## Deepening into Scaravelli Yoga Practice by Sara Reed

My discovery of the work of Vanda Scaravelli has been a milestone in developing my movement practice, research and the growing spiritual dimension of my life and work during the last 10 years. Scaravelli's development of a what I first called 'release based yoga' has been transformational in my own practice and my life. From this discovery, I have reviewed my own 'herstory', through my practice to the place where I, currently, reside. Through the ever-changing spiral of life, where I learn and grow at each return, and the bringing together of many experiences, reflections and observations, I feel more at one than ever before. Yet this is not a final destination as I continue to journey, explore, discover, learn and share. At this point, I feel a deep sense of connection with the practice and philosophy of Scaravelli Yoga and the resonances it has for me alongside and, more recently, through a merging of my previous experiences in bodywork.

I have practised yoga most of my life, since my late teens. At that time, it was an extension of my love of movement as dance, gymnastics, athletics and sport. I loved it because it felt good and I had a flexible, able and willing body. When I left school, and went to study dance full time I continued with yoga, mainly through attending classes and my own practice. These classes were mostly based on the method developed by B.K.S Iyengar. As a dancer, I had become so used to having a toned, supple body, honed on a daily basis by dance class, fitness training and 'Westernised' yoga practice of pushing the body to achieve certain shapes and poses, often over-stretching and goal orientated. Over the years I studied with several different teachers and, eventually, many years on from my first experience of yoga, I discovered another interpretation, or form of practice, quite unlike any I had come across before; this was Scaravelli Yoga, as it has become known. Scaravelli which, as Nan Wishner says, was 'harmonious with nature and centred around rest, continual new discovery, and clear, uncluttered awareness' (2003). However, I wasn't impressed at my first class based on Vanda Scaravelli's work, it didn't equate with what I had come to know as yoga practice. I flippantly named this new style 'floppy yoga' and, for me, it was certainly about releasing but as I later learnt not at all about being 'floppy'. As time went by and I became immersed in somatic practices, alongside my dance practice and teaching, I returned to the teachings of Vanda Scaravelli. It was in my second experience of Scaravelli Yoga that I truly discovered this method and through a very gifted and experienced teacher in Devon, UK.

I first attended Caroline's classes in her intimate studio, with its wood burning stove, and set in her beautiful Devon garden. Now that I know much more about this way of practice, and of Vanda Scaravelli herself, it seems to me that Caroline is a true disciple of Vanda and also someone who extends the work through her own very beautiful understanding, interpretation, development and intuitive teaching; through this I have learnt, and continue to learn, so much. Some of the words that Wishner ascribes to Scaravelli and her practice resonate strongly with my own experience over the last ten years. For example, 'a way to inhabit your body so that movement becomes meditation'; a practice that 'requires infinite time and no ambition', 'effortless', working with 'breath and gravity to free the spine' and in Vanda Scaravelli's own words;

*The pull of gravity under our feet makes it possible for us to extend the upper part of the spine, and this extension allows us also to release between the vertebrae. Gravity is like a magnet attracting us to the earth, but this attraction is not limited to pulling us down, it allows us to stretch in the opposite direction towards the sky.*

*The roots of a tree are pulled deeply down towards the centre of the earth, while the trunk grows vertically towards the sky, elongating and spreading through the branches into the space around it. The deeper the roots penetrate into the ground, travelling below the surface of the earth, the taller and stronger grows the tree.*

My experience, in more recent years, in the merging of my previous practice with Scaravelli Yoga has led me further into a much deeper personal practice and a gradual emerging of a different self, still shaping, still shifting and slipping back and forth between what was before and what I now know and reach towards. This practice involves a more holistic way of being in the world and in my 'bodymind' on a day to day basis. It shapes my practice and life as one, which informs my teaching, writing, thinking, doing, being and (re)searching. It is the gentle, meditative nature of this practice alongside that which I have previously known and reshaped which, for me, brings about a natural intertwining of my previous practices and Scaravelli Yoga.

A true discovery has been a greater desire, and ability, to be still and quiet. I value and crave silence within my life, which is often busy and demanding as it is for many of us in this frenetic world. The need for a spiritual pathway is satisfied daily in my, though sometimes too brief, pauses for yoga practice. Maybe this is just a chance to lie on the ground at the end of the day and feel supported whilst my breath stills and my skeleton gives way to gravity and falls, falls, falls. More special is the chance to retreat for several days, to take the time to look within both myself and nature, a chance to renew and refresh. These are just some of the qualities and pleasures I have found through Scaravelli yoga and through Caroline's sensitive and beautiful teaching.

Scaravelli Yoga has enhanced and made sense of my bodywork practice, dancing and moving, it is the thread which draws my practice together. It has been an opening, 'Like a Flower', as Sandra Sabatini describes in her book about Vanda Scaravelli (2011). So, this is the place in which I have arrived and continue to grow, like a flower, and it is the practice that I am inhabiting or doing my best to do so. It is my meditation and solace, my teacher and guide and the garden within which I sow and reap. It is my spiritual homecoming and the place where I know I can thrive and the place where I can share my practice with others.

With love and gratitude and continuing practice with you Caroline