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Trailblazing Wellness Provocateur,
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Trailblazing | verb |\ 'trā-l-blā-zīŋ \; when life crisis throws you off track,
forging a new path & blazing your own trail.

Trailblazer Interview: Kayla Kurin & Accessible Yoga for All Transcript

Grace - Hi this is Grace from gracequantock.com and I am here with Kayla Kurin from Aroga Yoga with a Trailblazer interview. Thank you very much for joining us. If you are listening or watching or reading the transcript we're super glad to have you here however you're accessing this and Kayla thank you very much for joining us.

Kayla - Why thank you I'm so excited be here.

Grace -So fantastic to have you here and many people who are listening and reading will know that I have loved yoga for a long time and it can be pretty tough to find movement that works for you, for anybody. If you're living with a disability or chronic illness especially when it involves fatigue, it can be especially difficult but luckily we have found Kayla. Kayla is a yoga therapist, teacher and health advocate and she works with people who are sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. I imagine everybody just put their hand up. Yes actually yes! So can you share with us what brought you to this point as well as Trailblazer you are doing this work?

Kayla -So I was sick with chronic fatigue syndrome actually when I was just a teenager. So I as you can imagine that was really really tough and I didn't really know what to do. I just try to ignoring it. I tried all these different medications as I'm sure everyone whose listening now knows none of that really works or help very much. Definitely nothing more than temporary results. So I just feel very lost and someone recommended to me to try yoga and I kept saying no. I kept saying it feels to woo woo. I don't think it's going to work and eventually I just kind of got to the breaking point where I had to try something. So I took this 8 week gentle yoga course that was aimed at people with environmental sensitivities and then at the same time I also took a mindful space stress reduction course which is based on the course by Jon Kabat Zinn who is kind of a big name in bringing mindfulness and mindfulness for health and for healing into the western world. So I did those two courses and in that 8 weeks I just had a phenomenal change in my health and it was amazing. And then I guess I'm sure your listeners know I was still skeptical at first, because you knows things go up and down and you get better and you get worse. So I was still skeptical but I really enjoyed that yoga a lot. Just because I had been an athlete before I got sick. I was very into sports and then I couldn't do any of that anymore so I loved yoga because it was something I could do that had that physical movement. So I kept up the yoga practice and I just kept feeling better and better. It was permanent. Yeah and then I guess having illness even I had discussed made me really rethink what I wanted to do with my life and what kind of work that I could do and I just decided that I wanted to study to be a yoga teacher so that I could help other people living with chronic illnesses. Find a safe way to do yoga because so many yoga classes are quite energetic and quite intense. That's just not going to be helpful.

Grace - We're all so glad that you did decide to do this. I think your story is going to resonate with so many people it certainly resonates with me. I remember when I first became ill like in some ways at the very beginning I didn't look that ill and so I was like maybe I'm not ill. Maybe we can just ignore like I was a teenagers you know but it's not

just teenagers we all can have that initial reaction. You know maybe I can just ignore this. Maybe I can just keep living my life and I did until I collapsed and relapsed. I was like actually that's not going to keep going. and I remember when I first wanted to start yoga practice this was when I was starting my healing journey and we go into this in depth in my coaching program the **Phoenix Fire Academy, phoenixfireacademy.com** about how I really wanted what I thought yoga would look like. So I wanted to be like a yogini. I wanted like it to kind of be cool. I wanted to be able to do all the poses. We didn't have Instagram then but if they're had been an Instagram that's was what I wanted to have looked like. I wanted to have that kind of sassy coolness to it. And so I said you know "yeah yoga every day for an hour! Yeah!" we're just bringing the perfectionist to bare here they're here very strongly in the gentle yoga. And my husband who some of you know he's Linus and he runs our charity **Healing Boxes** with me and he said really really compassionately "okay you can do that if you want maybe. But you know you can't actually sit upright right now. So I'm not entirely sure how are you think you're going to like warrior every day because you can't stand. Might be a little more challenging than you think". And so I ended up doing----working up to doing 5 minutes of yoga. That was the maximum per week. but I was still doing quite a strong yoga practice and I think if I had gentle yoga practice like your teaching, I would have been able to move into it more quickly and enjoy more of it because it would have been an accessible practice not a standard practice that I was breaking down to try and make accessible.

Kayla -Definitely and I think it's so funny that you bring that up. I mean even me having practiced yoga now for about 10 years I still have those feelings. So it's like huh I want to be able to do a handstand on a surfboard. You know all those things. I think it's yeah I mean it's always a bit of a struggle but having said that what I think is really interesting is that I worked with Some of the yoga teachers who used to struggle with eating disorders. And they actually started doing yoga for that very reason cause they wanted to get the yoga body they thought would help them get thinner. And then through even

though they came to the yoga practice for those reasons through getting more into yoga and wanted to adapt to the practices in yoga they were actually able to learn to accept their body and it largely help them in overcoming those disorders.

Grace -That's so beautiful and you know the kind of magical thinking that can happen around wellness---not competition with other people really competition with ourselves that can happen around wellness and where inspiration and motivation and fitspiration start to move into thinspiration and it start to move into kind of eating disorder and body dysmorphia and unhealthy or rather uncompassionate self-care practices. Name self-care practices start to happen and I had a wonderful interview with Natasha Lipton who is a wellness rebel and we talked a lot there about how dangerous the darker side of the wellness movement were seeing. And actually I noticed that on Instagram I was going on it when I wasn't feeling well enough to say get up and do some yoga. Oh I'll look at some yoga posts on Instagram, I'll look at some yoga hashtags because somehow that kind of felt---and it totally wasn't. it would have been better to just go lie on the yoga mat in cork pose or just put my legs against the wall or just do something would be so much better. But I kind of had this of downtime, this in in between moment. And so it was so easy to just pick up the device and scroll through and then I ended up doing a digital detox which I will also link to also talked about that in an interview with Brook. And I have now actually moved away from Instagram because I thought until I can use it consciously and not be dipping into it in these moments and so actually since that I have been doing a lot more yoga and painting and practicing the harp and being more with myself. So I think you bring up a really good point that it's not just the beginning but throughout our practices we can have these feelings. And it's how we deal with those compassionately.

Kayla -Yeah exactly that's amazing that you were able to do that digital detox and do more things that are nourishing to yourself.

Grace -I don't think I actually spent that much time on Instagram but I was amazed how much more energy I had. I think it just sucks a lot of energy even in like the small 10 minutes, because a lot of 10 minutes add up. it doesn't seem like much, like 5 minutes or two minutes but they add up especially if you've got a pace and your energy is very precious.

Kayla -Exactly.

Grace -So speaking of that of how people can get so much from yoga and how often the yoga represented with isn't made accessible and like I remember when I wanted to learn yoga I ran around all the classes locally and none would have me. They wouldn't let me in the class because they said they didn't know how to teach me, they weren't covered by insurance. They thought I might break a bone. One class said like oh we've got another disabled woman, she's an amputee like she'll be able to teach you because she know how to adapt the poses. I just thought that's so mean. if she's teaching me I want to pay her like I'm not paying to not teach me while another student taught [taught] me. And plus would she have training and the safety. And so I did eventually find a local yoga class which is adaptable and also a Chinese medical qigong class which actually designed for people over 50 and they let me in and it was wonderful. But that took years and until that point and even you know I can't go everyday as to having the accessible yoga which you offer via the internet is awesome is so important. So I wonder if you could speak a little bit about the about the need to make yoga accessible or everybody who wants to try it. Whether that's people a bit nervous at the woo or people who need it online or people who need yoga because they're disabled or living with chronic illness and they need a practice that is adaptable.

Grace -I think it's so important and I think that well it's great that yoga is so mainstream now. It's helped so many people like staying healthy and staying fit. It's not, it's missing out on a big population of people who are ill or who have disabilities or mobility issues that it could really really help. So I think it's yeah its really very important to me to make

yoga more accessible because I know that it has helped so many people. The reason I decided to do the course online is cause actually I started by running a course in London and I had a lot of interest in the course but only a few people ended up signing up just because people were worried they couldn't make the class, the time wasn't good. Then the people who did sign up they were missing classes because they were ill. I mean as you probably know in London just even getting around transit is very stressful. So I was trying to think how can I actually make this successful because as much as it's important to have that human contact with somebody they can't make the class is not really helping them. And that's why I decided to try the online version. I mean I also know people coming from smaller cities or smaller towns are not going to have access to a local yoga teacher or unlikely to have access to a local yoga teacher who is going to be able to help them. And when it's online you can go at your own pace. You can just do 5 minutes of yoga a week if that's what's working for you the time. And so that's why I decided to take it online. I think it's not widely available and a person to have this done it can be very expensive to have a yoga teacher come to your home. It's not necessarily accessible to a lot of people who are not able to work because of their illnesses.

Kayla -Definitely and I also want to extend this out because I'm thinking that I know that a lot of my audience are people who are living with chronic illness and disability but its also people who have come because they are freelancing or entrepreneurs and it's like by making that accessible when you're living with limits. Whether they are caring for somebody, whether it's a parent or baby or whether you're working two or more jobs whether you're a freelance and you're working like different hours. So an online class on and a compassionate can be very useful there, as it can for people who are living with grief or trauma or life crisis or mental health challenges. I mean entering out in the world can be incredibly healing and brave and wonderful but it can also be a huge step. You've got everything from going outside to travelling to being in the class with other people, then doing the exercises , then getting home again, then resting after it , then actually scheduling that into your day. That's a lot of factors that are happening and so

what if some of those are blocking people whether they can use this work to access something that might not have been accessible before.

Grace -I think definitely. I hate commuting, I hate traveling and even yeah when I was living in London. When I went to yoga classes there you know it at least half an hour to get there, half hour of stress trying to get there. You go feel great after the yoga class and then it's all undone by my half an hour stress trying to get to home. I developed actually a really great home practice when I lived in London because it was just too stressful to get to the studio and if someone is ill or has a disability that stress is x10 to get to the studio.

Kayla -I feel it in my body when you say that was a stressful transit. I'm just like yes I remember that. Let it out.

Grace -Just breathe.

Kayla -Just breathe that's right. Everybody who is stressed with this say triggers we can help you. You can just breathe with us if that's right for you. Just settling back in cause we're holding safe space to people listening right now. Just be calm right now. So do you have any top tips on people being kind to themselves through their yoga practice?

Grace -So I think that is really and this goes back to a little to what we discussed earlier about wanting to have that perfect yoga pose. I think for a lot for people its really hard not to get competitive with themselves in yoga practice and they want to be able to do the full video and they want to be able to do the all the poses fully. so my advice would be to let go of that as much as you possibly can and know that just the intention to do yoga is a yoga practice and I really recommend people who do my course they have a lower level of activity. You can do the first you can do the full course just by visualizing.

Kayla -Just by lying on the mat the whole time and visualizing the postures process and that can have actually an incredible effect on the body. You can improve muscle strength just by visualizing doing it. And you'll still have the video so you can still try to do them. I know that that can be a struggle for people but it's such a great practice to be

able to do that. And just to be kind to yourself with yourself and not to compete with yourselves because we're competing with ourselves and other people all the time. I encourage people to have their yoga practice as a place where they're not competing, where they're just being.

Grace -Do you have any thoughts for people on adapting or beginning a practice like if they got yoga practice now that isn't working for them or if they're they want to do yoga but it always seems so inaccessible. Is there anything like a first step you think people could take?

Kayla -I've got free videos on my website and also some links to some other free videos. I think just stating by watching some videos that are more accessible that come from somebody that you know or somebody you know to be a reputable source and just seeing that yoga doesn't have to be that very strong powerful warrior headstands sort of thing. I think that would be a really nice first step and that allows you to try it out and see if yoga is for you. Because for some people just yoga is just not for them. so I think it's a really great first step is to try some shorter free videos to see and then if you like it's really helpful to work with the teacher to get more in depth and to find the practice that can really work well for you.

Grace -That's wonderful and I'll link your free videos below this post. So if anyone who is watching or listening there'll be links the transcript and on this post around the video which is awesome. So I always ask the trailblazer interviewee what's the ----- because we've talked about a lot of things. So what's the one thing that people can do today to just start, the first thing to start to develop a deeper relationship with their bodies through yoga?

Kayla -I mean I think just breath. We said that earlier when we were talking about transit in London. I think just breathing and if you take one or two minutes after this and just take a few deep breaths and close your eyes and just pay attention to yourself. I think we spend so much time paying attention to everything else. Just pay attention to your body, your breath and what's going on. Not trying to change anything or do anything but just sticking with one minute and just breathing and being with yourself.

Grace -That's beautiful. Would you talking through a minute of that?

Kayla -Yeah definitely.

Grace -Thank you that would be lovely okay.

Kayla -Great so yeah just start by sitting or lying down if you like in a comfortable position. Closing your eyes and beginning to notice the breath, not try to change the breath, but noticing what it feels like to inhale and to exhale. And see if you can guide that breath through the nostrils, down the back of the throat, through the lungs, and all the way down to the diaphragm in the belly. Feel in the belly rise. And as you exhale feeling the belly deflate as the air moves back through the chest, through the throat, and out back through the nose into the room.

Grace -Wow that's lovely. I feel calm already. My voice I feel like has changed. My tone has come down. I think I have settled into my body more. Thank you.

Kayla -That's great. Thank you for joining.

Grace -It's my pleasure I really really enjoyed it. And so when people have obviously fallen in love with you and your work and they want to find you or work with you where do they go? What do they do?

Kayla -So they can go to my website which is **www.arogayoga.com** .

Grace -Can you spell that for us?

Kayla -Yeah it's a-r-o-g-a-y-o-g-a.com. I have a 6 week online course that includes six one hour videos and if you did participate in the course you will have lifetime access to those videos, if you want to you know start with visualizing and when you want to start to feel better physically do the postures. That's definitely something I recommend to people. Also I run the course three times a year. So if you're interested you can just head over to my website and the next date will be posted there. And then I also have a blog and some free videos with more information that people can do if they're just looking to get started and get more information.

Grace -Fantastic and that's **www.arogayoga.com**. Wonderful well I'm sure everybody's heading there now. I know I'm going to be. Thank you so much for joining us, for sharing everything with us and I'm so glad to know you and know you're in the world. Thank you.

Kayla -Yeah, me too thank you. It's my pleasure. Namaste.

Grace -Thank you everybody for watching, listening, reading being with us where ever you are. Namaste to you too and undo check back for more Trailblazer interviews I'm so glad you're here. Blessings and love.

