



Yoga Beyond the Poses Telesummit 2014 Interview with Karina Mirsky

Sarah: Welcome, welcome everyone to the Yoga Beyond the Poses telesummit; a series of conversations designed to explore and illumine the yogic sciences and how they help us find happiness and freedom creating health, wealth and grace in our lives. I'm your hostess Sarah Hutchinson. And I'm very excited today to introduce our special guest, Karina Mirsky. Welcome Karina.

Karina: Hi, thanks.

Sarah: So happy to have you here.

Karina: Happy to be here.

Sarah: And for those of our listeners who don't yet know Karina I'm going to give you her information. Karina is the owner of Sangha Yoga Studio and Training School. She's a faculty member of the [Himalayan Institute](#) and a presence at [YogaInternational.com](#). She's been teaching yoga since 1998 and training teachers since 2003. Karina is a senior student of Rod Stryker's Para Yoga and a student of Pandit Rajmani Tigunait. She holds a master's degree in East/West Psychology and has a private coaching and telecoaching practice. Her holistic approach addresses the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of people's lives. Karina is a national yoga and meditation educator.

So you come to us with so much lovely experience. Karina, I couldn't be happier to have you here, and I'm very excited for this unique topic that you and I landed on. We're going to talk about the yoga of relationships. And I was sharing with Karina as we were prepping for the interview I've had requests for this topic from yogis. Because we know that as we evolve as practitioners, our lives begin to shift, and there are shifts in the relational field and it's not something that's being talked about widely. So I'm just really excited that our listeners are going to have an opportunity today to listen in to what you have to say.

Karina: Thank you.

Sarah: So your background includes studies in yoga, meditation, east/west psychology, as well as entrepreneurship and surviving cancer. What inspires the style of private coaching that you offer?

Karina: All of my experiences inform how I work with other people. And many of my clients seek me out because of an experience that they believe that we have in common. We're both yoga teachers. We're studio owners. We've both faced an illness. So it's not that we need to share an experience to be empathic to



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one, but all therapeutic relationships are really based in trust. And when we believe that another person can directly relate to what we're going through, there is a certain amount of trust that's inherent in that. So when that's the case a little coaching can go a really long way.

I read an APA study (American Psychological Association) revealed that 50 percent of the therapeutic impact is the therapeutic relationship itself. Meaning that half of the healing potential in working with clients comes from the trust that's established with that client.

Sarah: Wow so 50 percent. Let me make sure I understand that Karina. This is really meaningful that 50 percent of the therapeutic impact, meaning how effective therapy might be between a therapist and a client involves that level of trust. The healing potential contained in trust.

Karina: Isn't that something?

Sarah: That's really powerful. That's really powerful, and it brings to my mind, and we can talk about this later on down the road. But that to my mind means that I need to be someone who really trusts myself in order for others to move ahead.

Karina: That's right.

Sarah: So when we've talked you seemed so clear about the foundation of a loving relationship. And how is trust a part of that.

Karina: Sarah, it's what you just spoke to. Loving others stems from this ability to love ourselves and to trust ourselves. Swami Rama was adamant in teaching, "Know thyself on all levels". So we have to understand ourselves in order to trust ourselves to make life-affirming choices and be worthy of another person's trust. And this self-understanding starts with curiosity. There's ways that we can kind of get to know ourselves. There's certain questions that we can get into for the inquiry with ourselves.

Some that I really like are "What am I most committed to? Who am I? Who do I want to be?" And then how can I show up in my relationships in a way that's aligned with who I most want to be and the things that I'm most committed to. And I can ask myself questions like, "What do I need to feel safe in a relationship. What do I need to feel loved, supported? And how can I ask for the things that I need?"

When we have the answers to these questions this is kind of the first step towards really knowing ourselves and towards being trustworthy with ourselves and with others. In yoga we call this Satya, truthfulness, the Yama of Satya.



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Sarah: So getting into the [Yama](#) of [Satya](#) and relating that truthfulness to that trust and seeing that as the foundation of a truly loving relationship. It does seem like just one of those solid stones that any of us would put in a foundation.

Karina: That's right, first that trust with ourselves, then we can be trustworthy with others, before others and to others.

Sarah: This explains again how when we evolve as yogis and become more truthful with ourselves, become more authentic as yoga is a process of learning about ourselves, how our relational field inevitably is going to shift.

Karina: That's right.

Sarah: That explains a lot of what I see in my own experience as well as the experience of my peers as they stay on the yoga path and become more authentic. Things do shift.

Karina: Yeah I love that word authentic and integral, and that really does start with this knowing of ourselves and this trusting of ourselves.

Sarah: So what are some reasons that we might not trust ourselves because surely this is a big mountain to climb. What's up with that?

Karina: The reason we might not trust ourselves is because we have [Kleshas](#).

Sarah: Oh back to yoga speak. We have Kleshas. Let's talk about the Kleshas. This is really juicy. Will you talk a little more about that?

Karina: Yeah absolutely. So for our listeners who might not know, the Yoga Sutras describe the Kleshas as the causes of our suffering. So we have Avidya (or a misunderstanding), Asmita (ego centrism), Raga (attachment), Dvesa (aversion), and Abhinivesah (fear).

Sarah: Those are some biggies aren't they?

Karina: Yeah they sure are.

Sarah: Yeah so when the Kleshas appear this causes suffering. I think we all get that. I get kind of in a Buddhist mindset when I hear that word suffering because that keys us so much into Buddhist thought. But I've heard you describe the presence of the Kleshas and how they might eclipse us as a collapsing of consciousness. And I would love for you to talk more about that idea of the Kleshas might collapse our consciousness.



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Karina: Sure. So yoga defines two aspects of human consciousness. And so I'm going to speak to them in the context of our identity. So our ego identity is limited awareness, and self-identity is unlimited awareness. So awareness is either really vast and open and spacious or it's somehow limited. And you spoke of the Buddhist teachings and there's a teacher named Tim Olmstead who did a really sweet little video on Vimeo about the Kleshas, and this is where I first started contemplate this collapse of consciousness. And what he says is that when we get triggered emotionally, when something happens and we find ourselves reacting, that awareness kind of collapses onto that one thing. It's like it becomes all consuming. 'He said that!' or 'She did that!'

And so in these moments when we constrict we're constricting into that ego identity where we have this limited access to a true understanding of ourselves and of the other person in that moment. It's like we're suffering. That's it, there isn't space for anything else. It just collapsed.

Sarah: So that might be when we say, if I'm describing to you when I had one of these moments, I might say to you well I just lost it. I just lost it with my brother when he said dah, dah, dah. I lost it. And this is really capturing, and you're giving an articulation to I lost my consciousness. I lost the spaciousness to be curious and truthful.

Karina: That's right. Nothing else exists. We're triggered. We're suffering. Consciousness is collapsed onto that moment, and we're in that constricted ego identity.

Sarah: And we've lost it. And all bets are off at that point about us behaving in ways that we would have any pride in.

Karina: Yeah, all of a sudden we've lost that alignment with who we're most committed to being.

Sarah: So what can we do in these moments of being triggered? Because if we wish to say authentic, and yet we collapse in these moments that we're triggered, how do we handle the emotional inflammation that arises when we feel we're being mistreated or misunderstood?

Karina: That's a really good question. Curiosity again, curiosity is the kind of entry point or the gateway out of suffering because it opens up the space of a witness consciousness. So when we start to observe our reactions, when we can actually witness our suffering, that's the moment when we start to transition from the ego identity into this more spacious self-identity which starts to release the contraction. It opens up the inner space. So when we're witnessing the



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part of ourselves that is suffering, then we have the opportunity to have compassion for that part of ourselves. And then from that more compassionate aspect of ourselves we can then speak on behalf of the part of us that is triggered and the part of us that is suffering, instead of speaking directly from it.

Here's my favorite example around that. Let's say something happens and you react and you get really angry. You could say to me, "Screw you Karina!" If you're speaking from the anger, you could collapse into that and you could just dart out from that part and say 'Screw you'. Or you could take a deep breath and you could loop into your own awareness, and you can say, "Wow Karina I'm having a really strong reaction to what you're saying right now, and I feel myself getting angry and I think I need to take a deep breath before I say anything else." And there's such a different tone in that. There's such a difference in the way that the listener will receive what we're saying, and it helps us to get out of that collapsed, triggered space and really opens up this place for us to listen to ourselves and to the other person and to speak to the other person from a place of compassion and curiosity and openness.

Sarah: Beautiful. And you know what's coming to mind is I've spent a lot of my professional life as a registered nurse working with children. And this is something that we are quite careful to teach children that if they're upset they should take a deep breath. Literally coaching them to get their nervous system out of the collapse and back into a place where there's space to discuss what went on.

Not too long ago I was at a school where a little girl struck a little boy on the playground and actually drew blood, she hit him so hard. She's a lovely, lovely very self controlled little 8 year old, and when we finally got her calmed down and off the playground, I simply did say to her, "I'm really curious why you hit him." And she looked at me and she said, "Because he touched my bum, and he did it on purpose." So for me to open the space for her, she was ready to be sent home, but I knew that this little girl was a little girl who had a lot of consciousness, and that somehow it had collapsed. So is this the same? Am I on the right track with the way that you're describing this beautiful model of holding space when that stuff arises?

Karina: Absolutely, and it's really about self-awareness. It comes back to know thyself on all levels. When I feel myself get triggered, I really loop into what are the sensations in my body. So if I'm feeling angry, I might notice my shoulders are starting to tense or my heart starts beating fast or my breaths get short. And that's when I know. It's like my body is giving me a signal that I'm in a Klesha, that somehow my consciousness is constricting. The mind and the body are



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completely unified. So the more self-aware we are at the level of thought, the level of feeling and sensation, the more we know when we need to take that breath and step back and really observe compassionately what's going on for ourselves so that we can react in a more conscious way.

So children don't necessarily have the same capacity for self-regulation that adults do, but certainly starting this training early on in life only sets us up for success as we continue to grow and mature.

Sarah: Absolutely because the children are showing us our raw self prior to cultivating that self-awareness.

Karina: Right.

Sarah: But that self-awareness, the way you're speaking brings to mind that the self-awareness helps us to see our own pain, that we can actually witness that pain. So how do we stay in that place of love for ourselves when we drop into that place of suffering?

Karina: That's a great question. Often our reactions in the present moment actually stem from an old pain story. So understanding that we have limitations that have formed out of this story is essential for learning to love ourselves. So this is like the yogic practice of [Vichara](#) is one way that it can help us to see that. So let me give you an example.

I have a client who has a painful childhood story. Her parents were not really present for her. They didn't show up for her when she was a kid. So they wouldn't come to any of her sporting events. They didn't support any of her art projects, and they just often left her feeling really abandoned and uncared for and unseen. And so in her adult life she would come to me when she would get triggered when someone stood her up or didn't call her back. She would get so upset. She would get so upset when some little event would happen in her daily life. One day she came to me and she said, I really get it. When I get that upset at my friends for cancelling our lunch date, I'm not really upset at the friend or about the lunch cancellation. What I'm really upset about is all the times that my parents cancelled on me or didn't show up. And I said, exactly.

There's a story that Rod Stryker, my teacher, has told in the past where the Buddha is sitting with a group of his disciples, and one of the disciples says to the Buddha, asked the question, how does the Buddha experience pain? And the Buddha says, you feel the pain of 1,000 arrows. The Buddha feels the pain of one arrow. And that really means that when we have this one thing that happens, the suffering of every other situation that kind of relates to that



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suffering and our past comes flooding in and we get damaged by 1,000 arrows in that single moment instead of just the one.

Sarah: Wow I love that. That image really works for what you're teaching me in this moment. Beautiful.

Karina: So in these moments what my client was doing is she would see that her suffering in the moment was actually being amplified by this old wound. So she could accept that that's what was happening. And then she could have compassion for that childhood part of herself that was so wounded. And that process is actually the act of self love. And when self love is available, there's an opportunity for us to transform a limiting thought or belief. So we can ask ourselves the questions like, is there any other possibility besides what I'm believing to be true in this moment. I use that one a lot.

Sarah: Wow. Will you repeat that, that's really a powerful contemplation when you're in the thick of it.

Karina: Yeah. Is there any other possibility? Does any other possibility exist in the universe besides what I'm believing is true in this moment.

Sarah: Radical curiosity.

Karina: Yeah exactly, and there's a couple of more that I wanted to share.

Sarah: I'm going to put that on a sticky note and get it on my bathroom mirror. I love that.

Karina: Absolutely. I use it all the time. It's so useful. You know, any possibility in the entire universe exists.

Sarah: Radical curiosity.

Karina: Radical curiosity. Another one is what might be going on for that other person which might not have anything to do with me. Is it possible that there's something going on for that person that doesn't have anything to do with me? And then another one that I love, this was proposed to me by a therapist named Hope Carr years ago, and I still use it today. What if no one has to be wrong?

Sarah: How would that change things? What if no one has to be wrong? And I actually have pulled that in every once in a while. What a handy, handy tool to reframe and to say in self-awareness and to go for that compassion and really logically see the situation that we're in which is all part of our yoga.



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Karina: It just opens up the space. It just expands consciousness.

Sarah: So we're back to this idea that what gets us in trouble are those Kleshas and what the Kleshas do is they collapse consciousness, and that our work as yogis and as mindful human beings—don't really have to be yogi do we?—is to keep that space open with radical curiosity, self awareness and compassion beginning with self that then extends to the others in the relational field.

Karina: That's right.

Sarah: Beautiful. Wow there's just so much here that I'm going to be able to take away and begin to integrate into the way that I conduct my relationships. I'm ready to get off the phone and get started.

Karina: I'm so glad.

Sarah: Getting to the juicy stuff. I want to talk about your formula for love. You and I love to chat, and we chat it up a lot, and I've heard you speak about this formula for love. And you've described it as the same formula for loving ourselves and for loving others. Will you share more about this because I love a love formula?

Karina: Absolutely. So it's really a path. It's a pathway. So first we get curious about what's going on through ourselves, another person. And curiosity leads to awareness. And then that awareness can start to lead to understanding. And then understanding can open up acceptance, and acceptance leads to compassion. So the formula—like if we were going to make it a mathematical formula—is awareness + acceptance of what is, what's really there in the space in that moment + compassion for it = Love. So awareness + acceptance + compassion = the act of love. Love and action.

Sarah: Wow and this can start with self.

Karina: Absolutely.

Sarah: I can think of an incident that I had earlier this morning where I began to criticize myself because I made an error that I immediately took to heart. However when I used my breath to drop into awareness, I was able to accept oh well you did it again. It's okay. It's really all right. You'll have another chance.

Karina: Yeah and I'm not perfect right, and it's okay that I'm not perfect. Yeah and that's having compassion.



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Sarah: Yeah that our imperfection is actually what allows us this growth that you're calling for, in all of our lives and particularly in the relational field. I love that. So awareness + acceptance + compassion = love. Beautiful. I see another sticky note in my future. I see it somewhere on my smart phone popping up to remind me. This is going to be especially handy. We're speaking to one another the first few days of November. So that means the holidays are upon us, and guess what, around the family table I'm going to be checking my smart phone to remind myself about this.

Karina: Good plan.

Sarah: Yeah. So the yolk of relationships is really love in action because when it comes down to it, when the day is over—in fact you and I share YogaRupa Rod Stryker as a teacher and he just recently said, yoga is not about purity. When the day is over yoga is about love. This is that arrow, this is that thing that we are so desirous of, and this is why we do what we do with our self-awareness to get to this love in action. So it's a steady practice of curiosity. We've talked about awareness, acceptance and compassion. Okay that's great. I'm floating around on the clouds, but what happens when we are the only one doing this work in our primary relationship? What if our partner hasn't gotten turned on and isn't in the transformative process like we are? What if you've got a mismatch in any of those fields? That's pretty stressful.

Karina: Yeah. So certainly when one person begins to transform through yoga, but their loved one isn't, it can put strain on the relationship. And when I was in graduate school I interviewed three of the most reputable psychotherapists in my area, and I asked them all the same question. I said, what does it take to make a relationship work? And all three of them said, willingness. So in my view the practice of loving is accepting what really is. That's the first thing is we've got to be truthful. We've got to really see that okay, this is what's happening. I'm transforming, I'm seeing the world in a different way and my partner is not. And so just accepting that. That's the first thing just accepting that sometimes if that's happening that maybe we are no longer willing to stay in the relationship. And our partner is not willing to come on this journey, if that's the case.

And then sometimes we can accept the differences between us, and we can find a reason to be willing to stay in the relationship. But it's all about willingness, and it's all okay no matter what ends up happening in a relationship. As long as it's based on really open communication and the acceptance of what really is happening and just loving kindness towards ourselves and towards the other person.



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Sarah: Yeah I just want to loop back to curiosity because when I've been in this compression which has been a big part of my experience of the yoga journey, in order for me to remain truthful to love, if you will, I've just had to stay open and curious about where I find myself, but also where my partner might find him or herself. Would you agree that if all else fails, get back on the curiosity bus?

Karina: Absolutely, yeah just get back in the formula, exactly.

Sarah: Beautiful. So as we evolve, our relationships will evolve, but it doesn't have to get dark, confusing or nasty. It can be done very consciously.

Karina: Yeah I mean really it's like can we have compassion for our partner if they are not reducing their own suffering, if they're not doing that work. Can we have compassion for where they're at? Can we have compassion for ourselves for what's coming up for us in the relationship to that? And again this formula just works for everything. It works for building a marriage. It's part of my sacred paradigm for dating. This formula works for trying to choose the right partner for ourselves. And it also works in consciously separating from someone, if that's really what's in the best interest for both parties.

Sarah: Yeah, that it can be done consciously and be done in that way that really respects the path that we're on which is this path of being awake and aware.

Karina: That's right and just holding ourselves and everyone else in that conscious loving care, in loving kindness and acceptance.

Sarah: Yeah when the day is over that's what it's all about. So on to better things, or not better things necessarily, some juicier things. You just brought up this idea of this sacred paradigm for dating. What advice would you offer to yogis who are out in the world looking for a partner because they are. For whatever reason they are ready for something new.

Karina: I watched this movie, which I know was a bestselling book as well, but I didn't read the book so I can only quote the movie. The movie was *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. And there was a moment where this main character, this student goes to his literature professor and he says, "Why do people choose the wrong people to date." And I love the response of this teacher. He said, "We accept the love we think we deserve."

Sarah: We accept the love we think we deserve.

Karina: So if I'm offering advice for people who are out there dating, the first thing I would offer is know that you're a good person. Know that you deserve understanding, acceptance and compassion first from yourself, but also from



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the person that you are choosing as your partner. So that's the first thing is really know who you are, what you want, what you deserve. Then the next piece that I would offer is find someone who has the ability to, and the willingness to hold you accountable to the person you most want to be. Do you want me to say that again?

Sarah: Yes because, okay let's get on ask.com and type this one in. Go, repeat that.

Karina: So find someone. This might take a little bit of curiosity. You might have to date a few different people. You might have to get to know someone over a long enough period of time to if they actually have both the ability and the willingness to hold you accountable to the person that you want to be. If they can help you stay in your commitments, help you stay in truthfulness, help you stay in authenticity. Is this a person that can really hold you accountable to that? You find someone like that, and you're going to have a strong, loving relationship.

Sarah: That's for sure because it sounds then like you've got a mutual sense of teaching one another along the path.

Karina: Yeah you can uplift and empower one another. You can remind each other when one of you strays a little bit away from that self that you most want to be, that self identity that is so spacious and open and compassionate. You can challenge each other and say, boy is that really the compassionate way to approach this situation right now? And help each other to stay in the formula of love.

Sarah: Absolutely. Looping back to the beginning of our conversation, this whole idea of trust, finding someone that you trust, can see you in your highest and will help hold you accountable for staying in the highest, and that's just going to be more and more cultivation of this key stone in the foundation which is trust. Then we get right back to that self reflective place that our yoga calls us to which is to be very self reflective. And if I find myself in relationships that are not loving or there is not trust, I turn to my meditation practice and go into a sense of self inquiry in what way am I not trusting myself or loving myself that then is showing up in others.

Karina: That's right.

Sarah: And as you called that Vichara earlier on, that idea of digging down to the seeds that are sprouting in us that are bearing fruit, and sometimes that fruit shows up in the form of other people that we might complain about. When



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actually in an unconscious way they're showing up to help us understand something.

Karina: Yeah they're calling us present to something, something within ourselves. We're being called present to something within ourselves.

Sarah: Beautiful. Wow, this is really practical advice for the relational field and for being an awake and aware person, a yogi if you will in relationships. Super helpful. Love the formula and I love this idea, for me what I will take away besides my sticky notes, is this idea that when I experience the Kleshas and go to my small self, my consciousness collapses, and I can keep it open with something as simple as staying curious. I love that. I can do that. That feels really like I can finish this phone call and do that ten minutes from now if I need to, that it can become a real tool for me.

Karina: I'm so glad.

Sarah: Yeah that is really beautiful. Wonderful. I'm sure people are going to want to track you down because I know we've got listeners who would like to know more, perhaps engage you for some more teaching or coaching. So how can people find you? What is your contact information?

Karina: People can find me on my training school website which is sanghayoga.com, and the school is going through some transformation right now, but the website will be the same. And my email is karina@sanghayoga.com, and that will also remain the same. You can find me on yogainternational.com/Karina for other little short talks and for free yoga classes. And I do seminars quarterly out at the institute so I would love to hear from people who have listened in and hear their feedback and hear their questions. I'm certainly open to continuing the dialog, and I really hope that this was in service for those who get to hear it, and thank you so much Sarah for the opportunity to share what has been one of the deepest spiritual practices in my life.

Sarah: Beautiful. Well thank you Karina for speaking to this topic of yoga of relationships because I hear a lot about this in the yoga communities and your articulation of it I think is really leading us into more and more insight about how to experience the richness of relationship with ourselves and extend it to others. Super glad to have had you on. Thank you so much. And thank you to all of our listeners. What a great session with Karina Mirsky. Remember that you can find her at sanghayoga.com and also at yogainternational.com. Those are two places you will be able to find Karina.



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So be sure to join the conversation about Karina's talk and the rest of the telesummit on Facebook. We'd love to hear your responses to what you've learned. So you can go to [Facebook.com/yogawisdomandwellness](https://www.facebook.com/yogawisdomandwellness). And remember that Karina's talk, like everybody else's will be up online, totally free for 48 hours. After that the talk is no longer available online, but you can grab the Yoga Wisdom Playlist and transcripts. That's available to you so that you have all of the talks in mp3 format, as well as the transcripts written out which is super handy, for example, if you're teaching. And you can get more information about getting the yoga wisdom playlist at yogawisdomplaylist.com. That's it. We so appreciate you Karina. Thank you. I can't wait to see you again. It was lovely to have you on the line. And to all our listeners thanks for tuning in to Yoga Beyond the Poses. Namaste.

Karina: Namaste.

