



Last weekend, **Bikram Yoga Park Slope** partnered with **Leslie Helpert** to help us tap into our vocal power. During this intimate workshop, we learned about vocal body in asana, did some warm ups and played a few rounds of improvised sound creation. The event was equal parts technically fascinating, spiritually inspiring and physically engaging. By the end of the session, each of us had gained new tools to approach both our yoga and our singing with a greater sense of center, balance, concentration and breath power. We caught up with Leslie afterwards and learned a few things... [Helpert answers the following four questions:]

#### 1. How would you describe your voice work?

I believe the voice is such an extensive instrument that (almost like the words “life” or “universe” or “spirit”) supersedes being able to be pinned to a definition. But I can describe my work in life, and that is as a steward to

sound. I am a performer, composer, recording artist, lyricist/writer, instrumentalist and music educator. My yoga practice, and my life choices are all a foundation for this type of dedication I have to sound, and the space in which sound most sweetly pervades. Through curiosity and passion, I support the development of clients' physiological relationship with the voice by helping them foster the tools to serve their greatest vocal and sonic embodiment.

2. People sing in the shower every day. But get them in front of an audience, and they clam up. What's the secret to owning your voice?

The many tools we employ to “owning our voice” all fall under the general container of this “secret”—the secret of literally feeling. *Feeling*, in this case of voice-work, means, very literally, the skill of locating our somatic integrity; efficiently employing precision and awareness of our breath, alignment, weight distribution, geometry, centering and physics. Most of us erroneously perceive that vocally “performing well” is solely a state of mind, and that “singing” or public speaking is an “all about me” experience—and thus, we can immediately fall victim to the generally conceived notion that our voice is operating from a place of self and identity. While, of course, we can “express ourself”, we learn when we develop our vocal instrument that we are more “transcending the self” when we sing. The voice is actually quite exactly like a powerful energy conductor, very similar to a wind or water mill. I like to say that I believe

the voice is our premier *Natural Resource*. Once we understand how we are vocally generative conductors, we can experience the joy of being fully transparent with our voice, holding on to nothing, and accessing all the juiciness of being a resonant, vibrational machine! In this way, we don't feel that we are "pushing" or "straining" with the voice. It becomes a ride, a real flight of fancy!

### *3. What's your relationship between yoga and voice work?*

Yoga and the voice are so utterly interconnected for me. I utilize voice often within my personal asana practice as a way to open and align the interior of my body, to focus my gaze, to focus my mind, or to "power wash" my energy centers! I utilize yoga entirely when I sing, from rooting down to lengthening my spine to dropping my shoulders and focusing my gaze, to practicing being present in space. A great example of how yoga and the voice work together is to take, for example, a "long-hold" posture in which you may sometimes forget to breathe. Suddenly, focus on (instead of exhaling) holding a long, diaphragmatically supported tone. Pause at the end, feel your core and emptiness... and then, on your inhale breathe as slowly and steadily as your exhaled tone. Use the inhalation to soften into space, to expand, to feel your outermost body's relationship with space and then, after holding the top of your inhalation in a state of feeling every cell of your body, begin the tonal exhalation again, paying special attention to delivering an evenly executed tone. This is yogic

breathing; this is a way to find and develop real core strength.... all borrowing from the perfect sea-star like geometry of the voice instrument.

### *4. In the workshop, you suggested that people "give to the audience what they give to themselves when they're alone." Could you expand on that?*

An enormous (and primary) role the voice has is to FEED YOU (not "others"). We misconceive the voice as an entirely outward, linear, pushing/proving unit and so when we sing in front of others, we conceive that we must be "telling them something". In this way, we can lose ourselves and center. When I sing and feel most embodied, the idea of "others" disappears. While I can feel genuinely connected to everything/one in space, I dial into the experience of feeling the mechanisms of singing, of riding sound as a wave by maximizing my instruments resonant capability. When we can use our voice this way, the experience is so utterly delightful that it lifts whomever is around us. In this way we must give ourselves complete command to nutritively "eat up" all the voice energy when we make sound, to feel as though we are fully occupied in that act, just as if we were alone. Thus, the musical conversation becomes about your own embodiment and connection to whatever you may call "god".

*Thanks Leslie!*