

WHY 'BABY YOGA' CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

As the decades go by, hopefully we see shifts in our thinking which make us wiser, more tolerant human beings. If enough of humanity is shifting towards being more loving, accepting and wise, surely the world will be a better place.

What is interesting about the way I have phrased the above paragraph is that there is a clearly implied *goal* -- to make the world a better place by cultivating in humanity a more loving, accepting and *wise* nature. The word '*wise*' is key. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary '*wise*' is "a: characterized by wisdom : marked by deep understanding, keen discernment, and a capacity for sound judgment b : exercising sound judgment."¹ A prerequisite for this kind of loving, accepting wisdom would be what I call *emotional maturity*, but over the last decade the term 'emotional intelligence' has come to the forefront.

Heretofore, what marked a person's 'success' was his *intelligence* quotient (I.Q.), and I was prone to agree. 'Intelligence' is "the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations"² One can have high intelligence and be able to apply it to learning something new like an academic subject or a new computer programme. However, the same person can be emotionally immature which decreases the capacity for sound judgement and keen discernment. If one is emotionally immature, it most likely will have a negative impact on his/her life even if he/she has a high I.Q. Emotional immaturity can have a disastrous effect on one's personal development.

The ancient Greeks knew about the contrasting aspects of intellect and emotion. Plato viewed emotions as wild horses which needed to be held in control by the reins of the intellect. Most philosophers and theologians have tended to agree with Plato. However, through the years it has become apparent that the head vs. heart issues cannot be resolved by the mind gaining dominance over emotions, but that the *balance* between the two systems needs to be integrated.

The Roots of 'Emotional Intelligence'

This balance between the two systems has its roots in the concept of 'social intelligence,' first identified by E.L. Thorndike in 1920.

Thorndike defined 'social intelligence' as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls -- to act wisely in human relations."³ Then, Howard Gardner, a Harvard University professor of education and author of the 1983 book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, stated that social intelligence includes inter- and intrapersonal intelligences. He defined these two intelligences as follows:--

Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them. Successful salespeople, politicians, teachers, clinicians, and religious leaders are all likely to be individuals with high degrees of

¹ www.m-w.com/

² Ibid.

³ Thorndike, E.L. (1920). Intelligence and its uses. Harper's Magazine, 140, p. 228

interpersonal intelligence. **Intrapersonal** intelligence ... is a correlative ability, turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate, veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life. ⁴

Ten years later in 1993, the phrase 'emotional intelligence' was first coined by P. Salovey and J D Mayer as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions"⁵ According to Salovey & Mayer 'emotional intelligence' subsumes Gardner's inter- and intrapersonal intelligences, and involves abilities that may be categorized into five domains:

- **Self-awareness:**
Observing yourself and recognizing a feeling as it happens.
- **Managing emotions:**
Handling feelings so that they are appropriate; realizing what is behind a feeling; finding ways to handle fears and anxieties, anger, and sadness.
- **Motivating oneself:**
Channeling emotions in the service of a goal; emotional self control; delaying gratification and stifling impulses.
- **Empathy:**
Sensitivity to others' feelings and concerns and taking their perspective; appreciating the differences in how people feel about things.
- **Handling relationships:**
Managing emotions in others; social competence and social skills.

In his best selling book "**Emotional Intelligence**" first published in 1995, Daniel Goleman built a case and popularized the overlooked domain of "E.Q." (Emotional Quotient) - based on the above qualities. He argued that the commonly accepted view of human intelligence is far too narrow. According to Goleman, it is a person's E.Q. as much or more than their I.Q. that enables them to succeed in life.

⁴ Howard Gardner, **Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences**, Basic Books, copyright 1983, Tenth Anniversary edition, 1993, New York, p. 87.

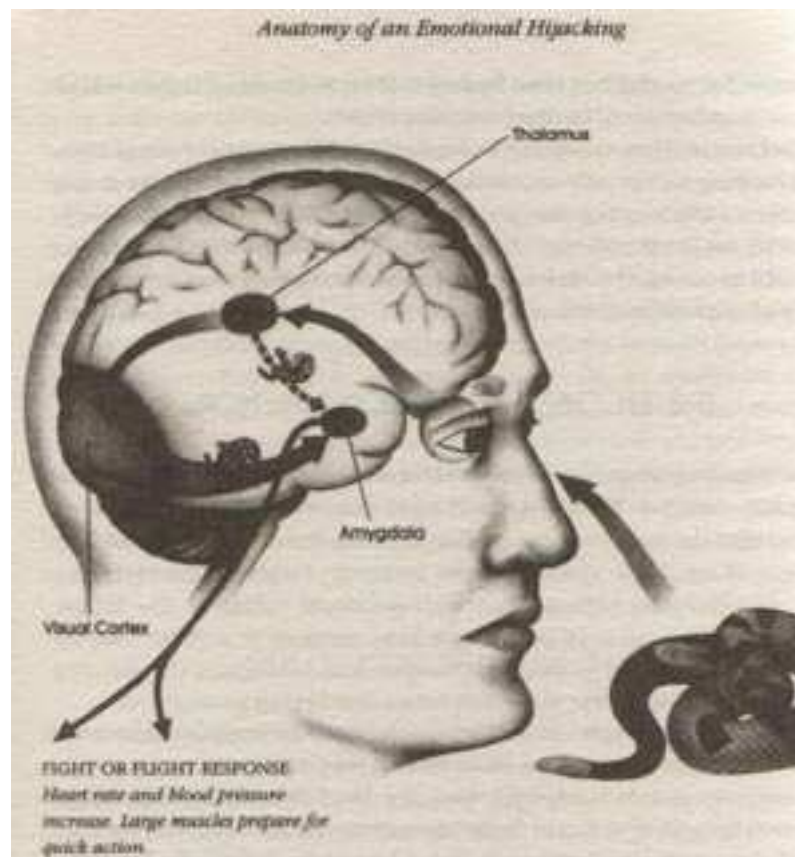
⁵ Mayer, J.D. & Salovey, P.) The intelligence of emotional intelligence. **Intelligence**, 17, 1993, p. 443.

The Anatomy of the Emotional Brain

In the first two chapters of his book Goleman outlines the anatomy of the emotional brain, explaining how neuroscience confirms that emotion and cognition are separate but interacting systems, each with its own unique type of intelligence.

Sometimes reason gets ‘hijacked’ by emotion. In the diagram below, Goleman shows how:

A visual signal first goes from the retina to the thalamus, where it is translated into the language of the brain. Most of the message then goes to the visual cortex, where it is analyzed and assessed for meaning and appropriate response; if that response is emotional, a signal goes to the amygdala to activate the emotional centers. But a smaller portion of the original signal goes straight from the thalamus to the amygdala in a quicker transmission, allowing a faster (though less precise) response. Thus the amygdala can trigger an emotional response before the cortical centers have fully understood what is happening.⁶



Thus, “[o]ur emotions have a mind of their own, one which can hold views quite independently of our rational mind.”⁷

Another part of the brain does allow a damper switch to the amygdala’s surges – the prefrontal lobes just behind the forehead. “This neocortical area of the brain brings a

⁶ Daniel Goleman, **Emotional Intelligence**, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 1996, p. 19

⁷ Ibid., pl 20

more analytic or appropriate response to our emotional impulses, modulating the amygdala and other limbic areas.”⁸ Without the prefrontal lobes most of emotional life would fall away as was discovered during the 40’s and 50’s when prefrontal lobotomies were prescribed as a cure for mental illness. The unfortunate cost there was that even though distress vanished, so too did *all* emotional life. Scientists now realize that it is the *left* prefrontal lobe which can switch off strong negative surges from the amygdala. The *right* prefrontal lobe is the centre for negative feelings like fear and aggression.

In the dance of feeling and thought the emotional faculty guides our moment-to-moment decisions, working hand-in-hand with the rational brain, enabling – or disabling – thought itself. Likewise, the thinking brain plays an executive role in our emotions – except in those moments when emotions surge out of control and the emotional brain runs rampant.

In a sense we have two brains, two minds – and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both – it is not just I.Q. but *emotional* intelligence that matters. Indeed, intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence.⁹

Therefore, the old Platonic ideal where intellect ruled over the emotions has been replaced by a new paradigm – one which encourages a harmony of head and heart.

Most of Goleman’s book then re-hashes interesting stories and fascinating scientific surveys which show that human beings would be a lot better off if they learned how to balance and harmonize the emotional and rational aspects of themselves.

If one was not convinced prior to reading the book of the need to nurture and develop ‘emotional intelligence’, one certainly would have enough evidence to become firmly convinced by the time Daniel Goleman finishes!

The Development of the Infant’s Brain

The amygdala matures very quickly in the infant’s brain and yet other areas of the brain like the hippocampus (imperative for narrative memory) and the neocortex (seat of rational thought) do not develop fully until much later. The interactions one has in the earliest years of life set down emotional lessons that stick with us powerfully for life. These are stored in the amygdala and deep feelings that seem to come from nowhere can be triggered later in life. They seem to come from nowhere because the amygdala stored them before the hippocampus had the capacity to articulate thought, before the neocortex could rationalize what was happening.

Traumatic events, like abuse by a carer, can have a devastating effect on the emotional memories stored in the amygdala. Yet later in life, we do not know why these emotions are there. On the other hand, it makes sense that if an infant is offered complete emotional security, it will give him the best possible start in life.

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹ Ibid., p.28.

The Importance of Learning Impulse Control in Early Years

Goleman relates a study that was done with four year olds. The facilitator of the study offers marshmallows to them. If they wait until after he comes back, they get *two* marshmallows -- if they cannot wait, they only get *one*. Impulse control is one of the most fundamental psychological skills one has. The children who managed to wait what must have seemed like an eternity showed remarkable skills in restraining their emotions for the 15 or 20 minutes he was gone. They would hide their eyes, talk to themselves, sing, play games. These children must have previously received a build-up of emotional security, a lot of *attunement* (more about this later on) from their carers, in the very early years of their lives.

The more impulsive children usually grabbed the marshmallow the second the facilitator left. Twelve to fourteen years later they discovered that the ones who were able to delay gratification were much better off scholastically, had higher scores on achievement tests, were more socially adjusted and emotionally balanced. Although this is not surprising, there is significant evidence that skills such as impulse control can actually be *taught* to children. If these skills *are* developed, then it stands to reason that an individual child's personal development will be more successful.

Attunement

While at Cornell University psychiatrist Daniel Stern researched a process he called *attunement* and he believes the most basic lessons of emotional life are laid down in the small, repeated exchanges that take place between parent and infant. Attunement happens when the parent lets the baby know that his/her emotions are met with empathy, that the emotions are accepted and reciprocated. As a baby delights in something, the mother empathizes and shows delight in a similar way (not just in an imitative way which would only show that you know what he *did*, not what he *felt*). This gives the baby the message that they are emotionally connected.

Repeated attunements help a baby to sense that others share in his feelings, and this sense is usually developed by around eight months.

If babies miss out on attunement, the child suffers. The child begins to avoid expressing or even feeling emotions. Emotional neglect can dull their empathy with others. The good news is that this can be repaired. 'Mirroring' is something a therapist can do later in life which gives a client an understanding of his inner state with being conscious of the technique. The client finally feels acknowledged, understood for the first time in his life.

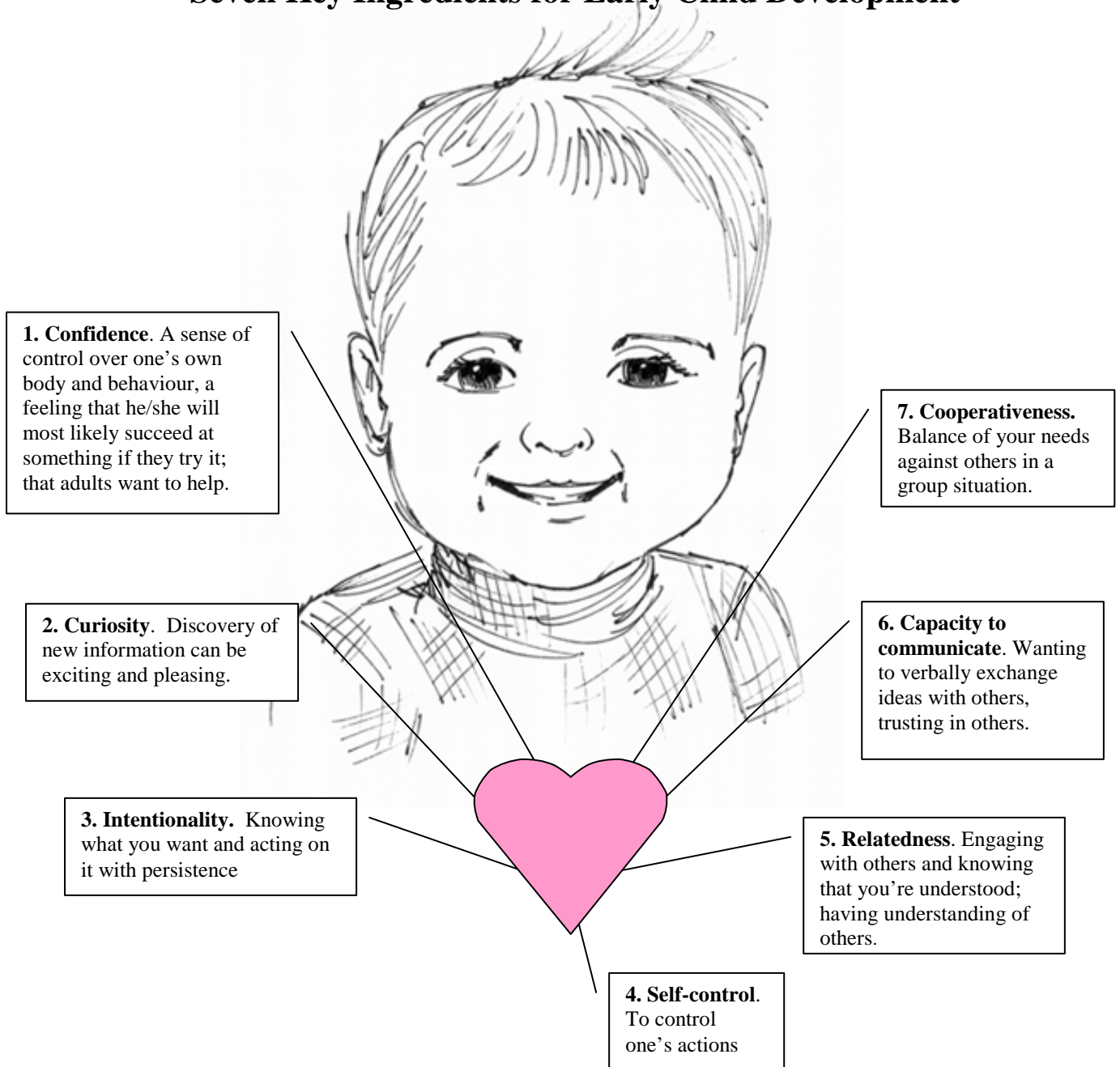
In adult relationships, the emotional rapport one has with each other can promote a synchrony and this seems to facilitate the sending and receiving of moods. This coordination of moods is the adult version of the attunement a mother has with her infant. The more adept one is at this, the more smooth their interactions will be at the emotional level, the more likely a person will be able to influence others and become leaders. This ability to achieve *emotional entrainment* is the heart of influence, which accounts greatly for 'success' in life. People who lack social graces have low *emotional entrainment* levels.

Other Ingredients for Developing Emotional Intelligence

Eminent Harvard pediatrician Dr T. Berry Brazleton says parents need to start building their children's confidence early in life. Parents' actions can generate curiosity and pleasure in learning. This self-confidence a baby receives from his parents will help children succeed in life. These emotional abilities are the essential foundation for all learning.

A 1992 report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs (see www.zerotothree.org/sch_read.html) makes the point that a child's readiness for school depends on the knowledge of *how* to learn (emotional intelligence skills) and I have included the seven key ingredients in the diagram I created below: --

Seven Key Ingredients for Early Child Development



Another report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs stresses how parents need to foster the emotional basics right from the start. The ‘let the baby cry’ theory is not acceptable. Take the scenario of a two month old baby who wakes in the night hungry and crying. Case One: Mother is tense and irritable, lacking sleep, has just had an argument with her partner – she will probably not be able to give anything but messages of stress and tension to her baby. She may even get frustrated when the baby senses her tension and stops feeding, so in a huff she may leave him to cry himself back to sleep. Case Two: Baby is assured and content when his mother lets him know she is happy to feed him and give affection in the middle of the night.

The first baby is learning that people cannot be counted on. The second one is learning that people can be trusted. The report emphasizes that simple neglect can even be more damaging than outright abuse. The risks are of course greatest for those babies whose parents are too young, are drug abusers, are depressed or who live chaotic lives.



Case 1: Neglected



Case 2: Assured

“A child who cannot focus his attention, who is suspicious rather than trusting, sad or angry rather than optimistic, destructive rather than respectful and one who is overcome with anxiety, preoccupied with frightening fantasy and feels generally unhappy about himself – such a child has little opportunity at all, let alone equal opportunity, to claim the possibilities of the world as his own.”¹⁰ The good news is that these children can be helped and many programmes have been set up which are able to repair the emotional damage which has been learned in these neglectful homes.

Not all emotional patterns have been learned though. In some babies there seems to be a genetic endowment for emotional disorder, the neurocircuitry is impaired. For example, some babies just seem to be born of a nervous temperament.

Jerome Kagan is a developmental psychologist at Harvard University. He found that 15-20% of children are born ‘behaviorally inhibited’. They are finicky about everything, food, strangers, new places. Kagan’s studies show that temperament emerges in the first year of life. “The great plasticity of the brain in childhood means that experiences during those years can have a lasting impact on the sculpting of neural pathways for the rest of life.”¹¹

¹⁰ “Lasting Lessons of First Four Years”, Heart Start, p. 13

¹¹ Daniel Goleman, **Emotional Intelligence**, p. 221.

The overexcitable amygdala can be tamed and parents can teach the child appropriate emotional lessons and responses. Especially the mother can play an active role in getting the timid child to become bolder. Kagan's studies showed that mothers who helped their children learn to adapt have a better response from fearful babies than mothers who become protective. Protective mothers picked their babies up when they cried and held them longer than mothers did who were trying to help their infants master the emotional upsets. By the time baby reached one year old, protective mothers were lenient when setting limits even when they were about to do something that might be harmful whereas the successful mothers gave direct commands and insisted on obedience.

The lesson here is that if a loving parent lets the older baby learn to manage his own upsets, he will fare better. The more protective parent seems to exacerbate the baby's negative feelings. The value of experience goes a long way in helping to mold the neural circuitry in a more positive way. Our emotional limitations can be changed with the right learning.

One of the most essential lessons in infancy is learning how to soothe oneself when upset. A mother coming to soothe a crying baby teaches him how to do this for himself. As the orbitofrontal area of the prefrontal cortex is rapidly forming connections with the limbic system (around 10-18 months), the infant who has had zillions of episodes of being soothed will have strong connections in the neural circuitry having learned that there is something one can do to soothe emotional upsets.

Parents also have some control over the child's vagus nerve which both regulates the heart and also sends signals to the amygdala from the adrenals. Effective parenting can lead to an improvement in vagus nerve function. As the child grows older, the vagal tone can be modified by talking to children about their emotions, not being judgemental about their feelings, giving the child alternatives to, say, hitting.

Psychology Today featured an article about the crucial role of emotional intelligence in raising babies in July 2000. The article quoted Dr Allan N Schore, Ph.D., assistant clinical professor of psychiatry and bio-behavioral sciences at UCLA Medical School as saying:

The human cerebral cortex adds about 70% of its final DNA content after birth and this expanding brain is directly influenced by early environmental enrichment and social experiences. Failure to provide this enrichment during the first two years can lead to a lifetime of emotional disability, according to attachment theorists. We are talking about the need to create a relationship and environment that allows your child to grow up with an openness to learning and the ability to process, understand and experience emotion with compassion, intelligence and resilience. These are the basic building blocks of emotional success.¹²

I have created the table on the next page which summarizes the 3000-word article relating to the development of emotional intelligence in babies.

¹² Joanna Lipari, "Four Things You Need to Know about Raising Baby", **Psychology Today**, July 2000

Four Things You Need to Know About Raising Baby¹³

Subject	Old Thinking	New Thinking	What to Do
<u>Optimum Stimulation</u> for your baby's emotional and intellectual growth	<i>Intellectual</i> development is the key to success.	<i>Emotional</i> development is the key to success.	Do not be misled by the baby 'milestone' books, the cognitive development guides. Just focus on emotional development.
<u>Birth to Two Months</u> How much do babies understand in this period?	Newborn's needs are mainly <i>physiological</i> . The emotional needs are only in response to basic sensory drives like taste, touch, etc.	Babies are <i>social beings</i> from birth, consistently showing that they actively seek sensory stimulation, have distinct preferences and tend to form hypotheses about the world around them	See your baby for the special individual he is at birth. Learn baby's preferences so you can maximise delight and minimise frustration. Offer an emotionally overloaded baby some soothing sounds or rock him to calm him down.
<u>From Two Months</u> Emotional Interaction with babies	<i>Baby is an empty receptacle</i> into which information and affection is pumped.	<i>Babies actually participate</i> in creating the attachment bond. The loving gaze from parents is reciprocated by baby. Both parents and babies have increased endorphin levels, forming an emotional circuit, a 'love loop'.	1) Maximize your <i>attunement</i> ability: use spontaneity and reflection. When in sync, you and baby will both experience positive emotion; when out of sync, you will see negative emotions. 2) Don't feel bad if you have 'out of sync' times. Mis-attunement can be a good lesson if you get attuned again. 3) Let your baby take the lead. When you let him know you understand his feelings and thoughts, it helps the development of the prefrontal area which controls empathy.
<u>Concept of Shame</u> – Older babies who hear 'NO!' on a regular basis	The "NO'S" are a necessary by-product of child safety and socialisation process. One should try to limit the NO's so they don't constantly feel shame (e.g. put things away so that you don't have to say NO! all the time).	Neurobiological studies show that episodes of shame followed by a recovery from the shame ('let's clean up this mess together!') actually stimulate the development of the brain's right hemisphere (source of creativity, emotion and sensitivity).	Embarrassment first emerges around 14 months, when "no" results in the child lowering his head, obviously sad. The child goes from excited (scribbling on the wall) to sudden deflation (the "NO!") back to excitement ("It's okay, let's wash the wall together"). Various parts of the brain get a workout/experience heightened connectivity, resulting in development of the orbitofrontal cortex (cognitive area) and limbic system (emotional area) and the ability for the two systems to interrelate emotional resiliency in the child and the ability to self-regulate emotions and impulse control. Productive shame reactions need a quick recovery. Extended periods of shame result in a child shutting down.

¹³Table compiled from article by Joanna Lipari, "Four Things You Need to Know about Raising Baby", **Psychology Today**, July 2000

How Baby Yoga Can Contribute to ‘Emotional Intelligence’ in the First Year

The ethos behind Baby Yoga stems from a deep understanding of how important it is to establish a foundation for a child’s emotional development in the early months of life. From the preceding pages, we have seen that for the development of ‘emotional intelligence’ we need to help build the following attributes in our children:

- **Confidence** – self-awareness, being able to observe yourself, having a sense of control over one’s own body and behaviour, along with a feeling of success when something new is attempted
- **Curiosity** – being excited and pleased about new information
- **Intentionality** – knowing what you want and acting on it with perseverance
- **Self-Control** – being able to control one’s actions, one’s impulses; motivating oneself
- **Relatedness** – engaging with others, having empathy, understanding others and being understood by others
- **Capacity to communicate** – trusting in others, wanting to exchange ideas, being attuned to others
- **Cooperativeness** – balancing your needs against others in a group situation, having social competence.

Baby Yoga helps to achieve the above goals by following a ‘format’ which addresses (on several different levels) the underlying theme of ‘emotional intelligence’ development.

The Baby Yoga format insists on:

1. **Getting-the-Baby-Out-of-the-Carrier**

The most important ‘place’ where babies are learning such skills as trust in others, self-confidence, relating to others, and becoming attuned to others is being ‘in arms’ or being held close to their primary carer. Although this is usually the mother, the primary carer role can be taken on by anyone, such as the father or a grandparent or a nanny. Being ‘in arms’ or being in a soft carrier that keeps baby close to the carer’s body meets the baby’s need for physical contact, security, stimulation and movement – all of which promote optimal brain development.

In Jean Liedloff’s revolutionary book “**The Continuum Concept**” first published in 1975, she related her experience of living with the natives in the forests of South America. She saw the relaxed and happy people lugging around their babies and never putting them down. She saw the connection between that simple fact and the quality of their lives. She came to certain conclusions about how and why being in constant contact with the primary carer is essential to the initial postnatal stage of development.

The person carrying the baby is laying the foundation for later experience. The baby passively participates in the running, walking, laughing, talking, working, and playing. The particular activities, the pace, the inflections of the language, the variety of sights, night and day, the range of temperatures, wetness and dryness, and the sounds of community life form a basis for the active participation that will begin at

around nine months of age with creeping, crawling, and then walking. A baby who has spent this time lying in a quiet crib or looking at the inside of a carriage, or at the sky, will have missed most of this essential experience.

“Attachment Parenting” is the new catchphrase for this babe-in-arms phase of a child’s life and Dr William Sears is one of the main proponents. He states “The infant who is the product of Attachment Parenting learns that his needs will be met consistently and predictably. The child learns to trust. Trust is the basis of authority, and a trusted authority figure disciplines more effectively.”¹⁴

Baby Yoga encourages the carers to get their babies out of the carriers and have them close to their bodies. This simple change of fostering human contact/touch by ‘baby-holding’ will:

- satisfy the baby’s need for closeness, touch and affection.
- promote and strengthen the parents’ emotional bond with their baby.
- stimulate neurological development because of the movement that naturally results from carrying the baby.
- help regulate their temperature and heart rate.
- allow the baby to feel more secure.
- facilitate easy outings and travel.

It has been proven that babies who receive nurturing touch through holding, massage, and other forms of loving physical contact gain weight faster, are calmer, and have better intellectual and motor development.

2. Getting-the-Baby-to-Move

The second essential function of the in-arms experience is to provide babies with a means of discharging their excess energy until they are able to do so themselves. In other words, to get the baby to move! Before being able to get around under their own power by creeping or crawling, babies are of course accumulating energy from food and sunshine. A baby needs constant contact with the energy field of an active person so that his unused excess of energy can be discharged. One can calm a fussing baby by running or jumping with the child and by doing the swings and lifts and inversions in Baby Yoga. The more movement there is with baby, the better!

Babies — and adults — experience tension when the circulation of energy in their muscles is impeded. A baby seething with undischarged energy is asking for action: a leaping gallop around the living room or a swing from the child’s hands or feet. The baby’s energy field will immediately take advantage of an adult’s discharging one. Babies are not the fragile things we have been handling with kid gloves. In fact, a baby treated as fragile at this formative stage can be persuaded that he or she *is* fragile.

As parents, you can readily attain the mastery that comes with comprehension of energy flow. In the process you will discover many ways to help your baby retain the soft muscle tone of ancestral well-

¹⁴ “The Eight Ideals of Attachment Parenting”, www.attachmentparenting.org/

being and give your baby some of the calm and comfort an infant needs to feel at home in the world.¹⁵

Aside from the release of discharged energy, the physical benefits of Baby Yoga movement and exercise are many. Baby Yoga:

- Strengthens muscles, keeping the spine straight and supple
- Establishes good breathing practices
- Increases joint and spinal flexibility
- Improves blood flow and circulation
- Assists the nervous system development
- Promotes the balance of hormones and the release of endorphins (the 'feel good' hormone)
- Stimulates cell growth
- Stimulates the skin receptors
- Assists relaxation process as the excess energy is discharged
- Detoxifies the system of unnecessary waste products

All of these physical benefits contribute to the development of the baby's *self-confidence* and *self-control*. Because the movements are fun and safe when done in the Baby Yoga way, the baby will be *curious and open to discovering new things*.

The baby's sense of gravity and movement will be developed to its fullest as the *vestibular* system is stimulated by Baby Yoga (most notably in the wiggling and rhythmic movements, the swings and balances, the drops and inversions). Coordination of the two sides of his body, the body percept and the baby's motor planning will be developed as well as eye-hand coordination further down the line. The vestibular development integrated with the development of the other senses (auditory, proprioceptive, tactile and visual) will instill in the baby:

- Ability to concentrate
- Ability to organise
- Self-esteem
- Self-control
- Self-confidence
- Academic learning ability
- Capacity for abstract thought and reasoning
- Specialisation of each side of the body and the brain

¹⁵ Jean Liedloff, "The Importance of the In-Arms Phase", **Mothering** magazine, Winter, 1989.

3. Relating in a Social Situation

Relatedness, empathy for others, being able to communicate, being cooperative -- all these skills are nurtured in a Baby Yoga group situation. Baby Yoga emphasizes the need to respect each other. Carers ask for the baby's permission in order to start the baby massage and yoga techniques. The sessions are baby-led, so if they have tired, you let them rest. The babies are never forced to do something they do not feel like doing. If the child is treated with this kind of respect, he/she will learn to treat others with respect.

Babies naturally have a lot of empathy for each other. When one baby cries, another looks worried for the one crying. Once they are crawling they may even offer something, like a blanket or a teddy bear, to soothe the baby. This sort of group experience lets the babies practice their empathy with each other. They share the joy of whooshing into a lift, they laugh together in the swings, and the laughter becomes infectious. The baby is learning to trust not only the carer who is whooshing and swinging, but also those around him who are sharing in the pleasure. He is seeing that people can have a pleasurable feeling in a group and the fact that we are *coming together* for that fun (made even more evident as they whoosh towards the centre to meet each other's laughing faces) makes it even more pleasurable.

4. Relaxation

Yoga is all about stretching, and then relaxing. As you stretch the babies legs, you say "Stretch" and then say "Let go" or "relax" as you release the legs. In this way the baby learns to release a muscle into a relaxed state. (Progressive muscle relaxation techniques are easy for most people to learn.) Coordinating this principle with the breath -- breathing IN to expand and allow the positive energy of *prana* to re-energise each and every cell, and breathing OUT as one lets go of any tension, any stress, any 'holding' of negative energy -- is a wonderful way to awaken the subtle energies of the body.

The central nervous system is at its most receptive during the early years of childhood. The earlier one develops a process of relaxation the more easy the process will be to initiate. The benefits can be profound. Deep relaxation on a conscious level is better than sleep. Behaviour becomes calm as the heartbeat slows down and the breathing becomes more even. One is aware of a change in energy. The body reaches a state of '*entrainment*'.

Our bodies contain numerous biological oscillatory systems which generate rhythmic patterns of activity, The cells that underlie the timing of these systems are often called pacemaker cells. The heart, the brain, our respiratory and digestive systems and the ANS [autonomic nervous system] all have pacemaker cells that underlie their rhythmic activity. When two or more oscillating systems lock in at the same frequency, they operate with increased efficiency; this is known as entrainment.¹⁶

Entrainment leads to a sense of inner peace and serenity, of love for one another and an appreciation for a higher consciousness. If one is seeking to develop emotional

¹⁶ "1.3 About Entrainment", The Freeze-Framer Emotional Management Enhancer (Interactive Learning System, HeartMath LLC & the Institute of HeartMath, 2001, p. 9 of User Manual

intelligence, the ability to reach a high level of entrainment level is of utmost importance.

Babies and mothers (or other primary carers) are naturally attuned to each other – relaxation with baby is an *interactive* practice. As the parent relaxes, so the baby relaxes; as the baby relaxes, the parent relaxes more deeply, and so on and so on. Few things in life are more rewarding than feeling the breathing rhythm of a baby *tuning in* to your breathing rhythm and vice versa, as the two of you become more and more relaxed together. This mutual entrainment is extremely rewarding and leads both parent and baby into feelings of ‘unconditional love’.

The more you become able to nurture yourself and your baby in joint relaxation, the more you are able to experience the unconditional love that bonds her to you and you to her in a real, physical way.¹⁷

5. Respect for nature, something greater than ourselves

There is inherent in Baby Yoga the underlying theme which is present in all yoga traditions. We are connected to the earth, to the air, to all the elements. We are connected to each other. We are connected to a universal consciousness -- whatever we as individuals choose to call That. This respect for ourselves and for *something greater outside ourselves to which we are connected* is a subtle theme that students (both babies and parents) will begin to pick up from the Baby Yoga teacher.

Conclusion

I find it intriguing that scientists and early childhood specialists have given us an amazing amount of data to confirm that we should be working towards a more harmonious balance of the head and heart by developing our ‘emotional intelligence’, however, very little information is given as to *how* we do this!

Although there is some hope for us ‘oldies’ -- with various types of therapy and counseling starting to become available, emotional enhancement programmes being initiated and an increase in the number of yoga/meditation classes available – surely the greatest improvement in E.Q. levels will occur if we lay the foundation for ‘emotional intelligence’ in early childhood. In this way, we can best foster a sense of emotional security, so that those deep feelings stored in the amygdala – the ones that get there before the hippocampus is able to articulate thought -- are *positive* feelings, not negative ones. As the infant develops into toddlerhood, we can nurture and reinforce the development of skills which build confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, communication and cooperativeness.

Baby Yoga offers us the complete toolkit with which to build the ‘emotional intelligence’ foundation in the most important stage of a person’s development – the first year of life.

As a yoga teacher and the director of the Yorkshire Yoga and Therapy Centre, I follow a *karma yoga* path – the path of action. Although I love to investigate academically the idealistic theories of philosophers and scientists and educators, I am a ‘Do-er’ and, as such, I require practical hands-on techniques that actually work

¹⁷ Françoise Barbira Freedman, **Baby Yoga**, Gaia Books Ltd, London (2000), p. 119

towards the idealism that many only talk or dream about. I found that the Birthlight 'Baby Yoga' teacher training programme gave me these techniques.

If I want to do my bit to 'make the world a better place' -- and I am at a place in my life where I can! -- then I can think of no better place to start than the neonatal stage, except of course the *prenatal* stage! For the prenatal stage, I have just completed the British Wheel of Yoga advanced module 'Yoga for Pregnancy' with BWY tutor Judy Cameron in Scotland (Judy was a colleague of mine on the Baby Yoga diploma course). In my antenatal classes, the development of 'emotional intelligence' is an underlying theme to my lesson plans (both for the mums and the babies they carry). These mums and their babies are *predisposed* to baby yoga of course.

At the Yorkshire Yoga & Therapy Centre, we are set up as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and as such can apply for funding for our social objectives. Through a social enterprise award from UnLtd (in partnership with Yorkshire Forward and North Yorkshire County Council), we have been able to offer 'pay-what-you-can' places to the disadvantaged. If the risks of emotional damage are greater for those babies whose parents are too young, are drug abusers, are depressed or who live chaotic lives, then somehow I need to see that the benefits of baby yoga can be made available to them.

The Yorkshire Yoga and Therapy Centre caters to all ages (antenatal, babies, toddlers, children/teens, adults, the elderly) and all abilities (from the fit and able to those *disabled* by chronic disease). It is with the early childhood years that I feel a real difference can be made. I am grateful to Françoise Freedman at Birthlight for shining a beacon of light upon the path that stretches out before me.

If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering. -Mahatma Gandhi ¹⁸

Laura Bissell, BWY dip, BWY Pranayama, BWY Pregnancy is also a Baby Yoga teacher (Birthlight), Remedial Yoga Teacher (Yoga for Health Foundation), Pilates teacher (Modern Pilates) and Ashtanga Teacher (Union Yoga). In September 2004, she opened the Yorkshire Yoga & Therapy Centre as a not-for-profit centre for the *whole* community (with specific classes for *all* ages from babies to the elderly and for *all* abilities from the most able-bodied ashtanga practitioner to the disabled). For more information, contact Laura at Yorkshire Yoga & Therapy Centre, 9-10 Halfpenny Close, Knaresborough, Harrogate, HG5 9ND, Tel: 01423 864343 or see www.yorkshireyoga.co.uk.

Birthlight is a charity founded by Françoise Freeman. Birthlight, PO Box 148, Cambridge CB4 2GB Tel: 01223 362288 or see www.birthlight.com

¹⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, www.attachmentparenting.org/

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