

A NOTE TO MALE READERS, TO FEMALE READERS WHO DO NOT IDENTIFY AS WOMEN, AND TO TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY READERS

I warmly welcome readers of all genders and none to engage with *Yoni Shakti*. I invite everyone, whatever your choice of gender identity, to benefit from the practices in this book. For Shakti is Not Just About Women. I refer to ‘women and girls,’ throughout this book, because that is how the humans I write about chose to identify themselves. Initially I conceived this book as being especially and only for these women. Over the years since it was first published, I have come to see that this healing work can also have resonance and meaning for humans of all genders and of all sexual orientations.

My work as a yoga teacher, trainer and therapist has been almost exclusively in the service of humans who describe themselves as ‘women who grew up as girls’. By this I mean that much of their suffering is rooted in their experiences as female humans who navigated childhood and puberty as girls, whether or not they currently chose to identify as women. My work has focused on experiences specific to female bodies, for example, menstruation, pregnancy, birth, lactation, pregnancy losses, postnatal recoveries (including after terminations), and menopause. Many people who presently chose to identify as women may not have encountered any or all of these experiences, and for many people who do identify as women these experiences may have caused great suffering. Some female humans never menstruate, but they still grow up as girls under patriarchy, and so they share many experiences with women who did menstruate at puberty. Some people who menstruate do not identify as women; and some people who identify as female do not menstruate. Many of all these people (including some who identify as men and have never menstruated,) have found enquiries into the cycles of Shakti, and of the source power of Yoni Shakti to be helpful.

For beneath all of our life experiences that are mediated through gendered identity, every being dances to the powerful rhythms of the cycles of life that connect us all. I invite any men, trans-women and non-binary readers who have an interest in these practices, and who seek to foster the evolution of your own feminine side, to experiment with the practices I describe and discover for yourself their application to your own experience.

The circles of feminist healing I hold are usually exclusively women-only. I say usually, because there have been numbers of occasions where, in agreement with the whole group, gay brothers have joined the sisters to practice and/or train together. We have also made agreements to welcome trans-women who grew up as boys into these women’s yoga circles. And these inclusive circles have been extremely healing and powerful. The agreements made about who is included always involve the prior positive affirmation from every single women in the group that she is entirely happy to welcome the brother, or the trans-sister into the circle.

In my experience, the best choices about inclusion always depend upon the shared intention of the group. So, if the intended focus is to explore menopausal challenges and joys, the agreement about who to include is usually to admit only those who have experiences to share about menopause. If the intended focus is to encounter menarcheal trauma, then the group might be expected to include only those who have experienced a first menstruation, or perhaps also women grieving the fact that they never menstruated, or gay brothers for whom the nature of their adolescent experiences brings them into resonance with the tender vulnerability that menarcheal work often stirs up. Equally, there are experiences specific to trans-women that can be helpfully held and nourished by a trans-women only circle, and there are experiences common to all who identify as women that would be better welcomed into a fully inclusive circle. I have, in these past twenty years of doing this work, encountered so very many variables, and witnessed so very many specific experiences that can be held and supported within healing circles of belonging. So, I choose keep my heart and mind wide open to all the possibilities for inclusion, for exclusive circles, for affinity groups, for co-creations and collaborations within, between and amongst people of all genders. My intention



always is to make the choice that best serves the nurture and nourishment of the group.

At some point in the future, I would love to imagine a future form of yoga practice for men and women and people of all genders to enjoy together in celebration of *yoni shakti*. In the meantime, I feel that much of the discussion and observations presented in this book may be of interest to men who live with women, to people who grew up in female bodies but do not identify as women, to trans-gender women and to non-binary people. Yoni Shakti is the source power of life itself, and life's cycles and rhythms move through all beings, of all genders. I focus on women's well-being because this is the area of practice with which I have most experience. I offer what I have learnt working with women who grew up as girls to the wider community, in the hope that it may at some point be of use to humans of all genders. Acknowledging with respect the cycles of Shakti in women and girls can empower all humans to live with respect for Prānā Shākti and to restore respect for the cycles of the power of life, for the benefit of all humans and the earth herself. This is co-creative planetary healing.

